

Brief Summary of Planning Board Deliberations on the Request by Pitt Hill LLC for a Conditional District Rezoning of Parcel 2721 to CD-NB for a Retail Shopping Center on 15-501

The Planning Board met on this application on January 7, 2020 and after over an hour of discussion among members of the PB, staff and the applicant's team, the Board voted 8-3 to recommend denial of the application. Major points considered by the Planning Board are as follows:

1. In the land use plan, there are 7 existing commercial nodes on 15-501 between the Haw River and the Orange/Chatham line; Bynum, Fearington Pl, Briar Chapel (three nodes), Chatham Downs, Cole Park and Wal Mart. All of these areas are zoned for commercial activities but many have yet to be developed and occupied. Prime examples are 2 of Briar Chapel's commercial nodes, Fearington Pl, and the Northeast corner of Chatham Downs {Williams Corner}. This totals approximately a million sq ft of space already zoned commercial. The majority felt that it would be better to fill in some of the empty commercial space before rezoning additional residential properties to commercial. The majority felt that rezoning now poses a real risk for commercial sprawl along 15-501 as there are many opportunities for placing retail activities without rezoning.

2. In addition to empty commercial zones there are existing vacancies in developed commercial areas. An example is the former Ace Hardware which is 17000 sq ft; a similar size [14400sq ft] as requested by the developer.

3. The Land Use Plan emphasizes that much of commercial activity should be located in our towns which have water and sewer. Chatham Park will be adding a huge amount of commercial opportunities for retail and office businesses and there are existing vacancies in Pittsboro. Points 1, 2 and 3, taken together, are reasons why the requested rezoning to commercial retail is not needed now and is not essential or necessary for Chatham County.

4. The Planning Board had previously recommended that a request to rezone an adjacent parcel to NB be changed to O and I, which is less impactful than retail stores. The applicant agreed and that is now a chiropractor facility (25 patients per week). This facility is not visible from the road. Pitt Hill LLC might want to consider changing their request to O and I. The Planning Board also recommended denial of a request to rezone multiple properties for a Publix Supermarket adjacent to the property in question; that application was withdrawn before it reached the Commissioners.

5. Polks Landing Development is a large residential subdivision at the Southwest side of the Chatham Downs commercial node. It was developed in the 1970's and the residents are very concerned about high impact commercial activity bordering their subdivision. Multiple residences abut Parcel 2721. Concerns raised were environmental, traffic, privacy and loss of property value.

6. The Land Use Plan states there should be variability and flexibility in Community Centers. Therefore, not all four corners of community centers should necessarily be filled with high impact commercial activities.

7. The main point emphasized by those voting in the minority was that this application lies within a designated Community Center which should allow retail activities to the full extent. The minority and the applicant also stated that developers and landowners should be able to look at the Land Use Plan and decide where to seek approval for commercial activity. Those who supported the rezoning also felt that none of the property currently approved for commercial development meets the needs of small local businesses and that the site plan concentrated the most intense aspects of the development close to the highway providing a buffer for neighboring residences and property owners.

8. The Planning Board also recognizes that this property might be rezoned at some point in the future. The minority felt that now is the time whereas the majority felt that it is not in the best interest of Chatham County to approve retail/commercial until the need is evident.

George Lucier

Chair Planning Board