

We wanted to provide some context for the Chapel Ridge project that will be up for consideration in the next meeting. It has been sent to the board of commissioners with a recommendation for approval, but was never voted on by the planning board.

We spent two meetings discussing the project and found out it could be continued to a third meeting during our second discussion. Lacking the certitude our members felt necessary to support the project, it was tabled. We did not hold the next meeting because of personal reasons and our seemingly necessary return to in-person meetings dropped our participation below the level necessary to take official votes.

In our discussions, we did get a feel for the project and it would have been a difficult decision for many of our members. The current plan increases density, adds units, and reduces the necessary infrastructure to accomplish the project. In our opinion, there were not significant hangups with these aspects of the potential plan.

Increased density makes sense to add more affordable housing options and it should go to places that have functioning septic systems with adequate capacity. The additional units were not voluminous enough to be a major concern. While the project had a slight increase in overall density, it does provide more open space than the original plan and the current application averages 1.3 dwelling units per acre. The reduction in sprawling infrastructure allowed for a greater area to be preserved in its natural state.

There were some concerns with spray fields, but we think they were adequately addressed and ameliorated in our meetings. The crucial issues were the traffic plans and which roads were to be used to access the incoming development. In the original plans, the new development would access Old Graham Road through the Parks at Meadowview.

In the years prior to this revived plan, The Parks at Meadowview community installed private gates that would have blocked this access. It seems the current developer spoke with these residents first and determined that it would be best to reroute its traffic to Old Graham Road (40% in a traffic study) through other parts of the Chapel Ridge community.

Our first meeting consisted of opposing public input on this issue. Residents of the Parks at Meadowview were supportive because the new phase would add amenities they would be able to access without increasing traffic burden in their part of the community. Residents of the rest of Chapel Ridge were against the new plan because they would receive more construction and resident traffic without any benefits.

These issues continued through our second discussion and the board asked for a signed agreement with the HOA for the non-Meadowview parts of Chapel Ridge stating that they had agreed on a traffic plan that meets everyone's needs. There seemed to have been progress towards that prior to what would have been our third meeting, but we never heard what it was.

We wanted to provide proper context for the commissioners prior to their vote on this project. As we did not vote, we cannot speak for other members of this board, but feel it was going to be a difficult decision for many. We think the board wanted to get this project finished and out from under its outdated regulations. Many were comfortable with the plans for the community, but felt that the shift in traffic patterns placed an unfair burden on a part of the community that would not have received it originally.

If the project is denied, their rights under previous regulations will expire and they will have to resubmit under the current regulations. They have met or exceeded the current regulations with regards to stream buffers and environmental protection, but do not want the yearlong delay to start the project. The Parks residents do not want the delay either because they would like to have the amenities included in the new phase. It would have been a difficult call for us and now it is a tough one for the commissioners. If there is a traffic plan in place that the community finds acceptable, we think it is an approvable project.

Please let me know if you have any questions. If other planning board members feel there is more that should be added, please pass that along.

Respectfully Submitted,,
George Lucier and Jon Spoon
Chair and Vice-Chair of the Chatham County Planning Board