

Town planning board approves zoning proposal

By Colin McCandless

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The Town of Franklin planning board held a special called meeting Thursday to review a set of proposed Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) overlay regulations. Developer Tim Ryan presented them to the town in conjunction with his plans for a community called The Sanctuary Village.

Ryan presented a discussion of the proposed subdivision to be located off Crisp and Iotla streets at the Town of Franklin Board of Aldermen meeting Sept. 5. It includes eight parcels adding up to 22.5 acres and would entail larger homes, cottages, condominiums and a small commercial space to serve as a sales center or coffee shop. All streets would have sidewalks and on-street parking.

Ryan noted then that his traditional development plan did not follow the subdivision ordinances Franklin currently has on the books and the district would need to be rezoned and have no restrictions on lot sizes. He had submitted eight rezoning petitions requesting that overlay regulations apply to the project and zoning changed from residential to a traditional neighborhood.

A traditional neighborhood development is a mixed-use neighborhood where residential, commercial and civic buildings lie within close proximity to one another. At the Oct. 26 town planning board meeting, town administrator Mike Decker provided board members an overview of the TND regulations and indicated areas where certain points or language might require clarification or further explanation.

Board members directed questions to Ryan about topics such as meeting the standards for a pedestrian-friendly development, parking and traffic-related issues, regulation enforcement and yard setbacks and building height requirements (35-42 feet maximum). Members asked Ryan to address how his staggered parking plan would help slow traffic and create a safer environment for pedestrians.

Ryan said the on-street parking plan is an essential element to slowing traffic and that people would feel more comfortable walking on sidewalks because of the speed limit of 9-10 miles per hour it would achieve. "It naturally creates a safer environment for pedestrians," said Ryan of the combination of narrow roads and street parking. "Every aspect of the community has been thought out and designed based on history and proven formulas." He added that he has consulted well-documented studies of urban development that have been proven over time.

Chairman Larry Hollifield requested clarification on the zero setbacks required for front and rear yards and questioned whether this would present an issue as far as a residence's distance from actual traffic if it faced the street. "These distances are driven by studies conducted by architects and New Urbanism (an urban design movement that focuses on reducing sprawl and creating sustainable communities), about how you achieve a comfortable feel in a community," Ryan said.

Hollifield then inquired about the plan for narrow streets coupled with street parking and how it would result in a safer environment for pedestrians. Ryan cited evidence that demonstrates that wider streets generally produce faster speeds and cause more accidents whereas narrowing streets has been shown to reduce the number of accidents and traffic-related pedestrian incidents. "This is not driven by new ideas," Ryan reiterated. He commented that architects have conducted research studying these types of communities.

Members expressed concerns over Iotla being the only entrance to Ryan's development and what that would mean for traffic. He said he would be seeking connectivity with Riverview, but there were no guarantees yet. Ryan commented that with more growth comes more traffic. He added that the same thing could be said for Bryson City Road as more developments occur there and along Burningtown.

Member Dick Wallace inquired as to what entity would enforce the codes to ensure that these TND standards are met if adopted. Ryan replied that people could express any concerns to the Homeowner's Association for the development, which would be formed before sales begin. The HOA would provide each resident a thorough document outlining every aspect of the community. Ryan said everyone who decided to move into the neighborhood would have to read and accept the terms and rules therein prior to a sale approval.

Board member David Rowland asked if the HOA guidelines could be amended if necessary to fit the situation. Ryan said the Village Sanctuary has an attorney that specializes in the drafting and interpretation of HOA documents for TNDs who would implement appropriate measures to address these circumstances. Everything that comes from the TND regulations stems from the charrette document Ryan devised for The Sanctuary Village, a process he began in July.

A charrette is a unique planning session where citizens, designers and others have an opportunity to collaborate on a vision for development. It provides a public forum for the dissemination of ideas and allows for immediate feedback to the authors of the project that help streamline the process and prevent future delays. "What these regulations are will be very clear to everyone," Ryan said. "We are making it extra transparent what are community entails. All of this is a choice for anyone who wants to live in our community." Decker had noted earlier that without having these types of standards, this development could not work.

Ryan described the traditional development as featuring appealing architectural homes, pavilions and buildings with unique exteriors. "It creates an interesting area for people to walk through," Ryan said. Ryan had said The Sanctuary Village would emphasize walking opportunities and close proximity to businesses "We want our community to be a strong supporter of Main Street shops and the Franklin community," Ryan said.

Wallace asked Ryan to cite examples of other traditional development communities. Ryan said existing places include Black Mountain, Beaufort, S.C., North Augusta, S.C., and a number that have been created in the Panhandle. He added that there are over 100 such communities across the country under construction now.

Board member Denton Higdon said he like the TNDs' plan of incorporating a mixed-use area where some buildings would house businesses on lower floors and residences above. "It will go back to how things used to be years ago," Higdon said. "I appreciate what you are doing and I think it's going to enhance the neighborhood."

Following the discussion period with Ryan, Decker asked the town planning board if they were ready to give a recommendation to the town or if they needed more time before the Nov. 6 meeting. "I'm ready to go now," Wallace said. "I feel like Mr. Ryan's put a whole lot of effort into this." "Everything is resolved to me," Rowland said.

The planning board then passed a motion to approve Ryan's proposal for the Traditional Neighborhood Overlay Regulations and recommend that the town proceed with text changes for the regulations. The regulations will be codified as Section 153.23 of the town's existing zoning code. Decker said the planning board would have to decide how it would fit into the revised zoning code next year

Section 153.23 TND overlay regulations explanation of intent-Sidebar

“The Traditional Neighborhood Overlay is primarily intended to allow the development of residentially zoned areas as traditional neighborhood developments (“TNDs”) exhibiting the characteristics of a TND appropriate to their urban context. Thus, the applications of this overlay should result in a development utilizing elements appropriate for its relationship to the surrounding and nearby uses and oriented to pedestrians.”