

Conflict of Interest? The Fix is In?

-Chris Smithson, Southern Pines native, resident, and Councilmember

I normally don't like to respond to the various conspiracy theories out there, but I think a lot of people are getting the wrong information regarding the Pine Needles/Hines/Land Design role in the application for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) amendment to the Southern Pines Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). Additionally, people are being told that the specific Pine Needles Village project is "a done deal."

I'll address the issue of Land Design first. Land Design is being paid by the developer to submit an application for an ordinance amendment to the UDO. Anyone has the right to submit an application for an ordinance amendment and it is done all the time. This amendment would create a new zoning classification allowing for PUD districts. Some have said that Land Design has a conflict of interest because the Town is paying them to advise the Planning Board on this subject. This is not true. The Town is not paying Land Design anything to work on or advise on the PUD amendment. They represent their client, not the Town. The Town *has* used and will probably continue to use the services of Land Design as well as other local firms, including Hayter, and Zucchini, when it needs their expertise on certain specific projects, but at this point is not contracted with any firm for the PUD ordinance.

Now to the issue of Pine Needles Village being a "done deal." First off, nothing is final until there is a vote on the matter. At this point, there is no development proposal on the table from Pine Needles for anyone to form an opinion or base a voting decision on. The proposal was withdrawn by the applicant until (they hope) the Town agrees to put a PUD ordinance in place. The PUD ordinance would not be an approval for anything Pine Needles wants to do at Pine Needles Village. They would still need to get their property rezoned to PUD. The proposed ordinance as it is currently written requires the rezoning be accompanied by a Conceptual Master Plan. This plan gives all the details, requirements, restrictions, etc. on the proposed development. The concept is that the Town and the developer get together on the plan and make any changes necessary to the details to make it an acceptable project for the property and the town. If the developer cannot or will not make the necessary changes to convince the Council the proposal is a good one, it won't get approved and the property won't get rezoned.

So, if there is no development proposal on the table and there is no ordinance in place allowing a proposal to even be considered, much less approved, how could the project's approval be a "done deal?" There are so many questions to be answered and so many steps that have to be taken before Pine Needles Village comes close to being approved, that anyone telling you the whole thing is "a done deal" is not telling you the truth. Hopefully someone saying that is merely misinformed and not spreading untruths on purpose.

Agree or disagree with what you just read? Want to provide feedback? Please do so. It's not even necessary to send anonymous letters or create anonymous "concerned citizens" websites. Just send an e-mail. e-mail: Chris@ChrisSmithson.com