

## Oh Boy A New Conspiracy!!

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

I'm getting those conspiracy questions again...

I really wish Kelly Miller hadn't done that interview in the Pilot. It just created more grist for the mill for those who choose to see conspiracies around every corner.

One of his statements was,

I think it is important that folks know that we didn't just say PUD. We were talking to the town officials at the very first meeting. ...

Before we submitted this, the town officials and the town staff said they would really like this done, the PUD.

Of course, those who choose to read things only one way have decided again that "the fix is in" and that the Council has already decided they are going to approve the developer's PUD proposal and development plan.

As Paul Harvey said, "now for the rest of the story." In a public meeting on July 24th attended by the public and reported on by the press, Miller and his partners and attorney presented the general concept and parameters of what they wanted to do on the Pine Needles property. This was reported in the Pilot in an article by Sara Lindau titled "Pine Needles Plans \$400 Million Village." This was the first time details had been presented to the Council, but the developer had conferred with staff previously as is customary and recommended in the UDO.

After learning many of the details of this large project proposal we had heard for a while was coming for our consideration, we expressed some of our concerns based on initial reactions. Traffic, affordable housing and other various impacts immediately came to mind.

After we learned about the project and expressed some initial feedback, we, the Council, were asked how we would prefer they apply for the development of the project. Current zoning on the property did not quite allow for what they wanted to do, so I recall we had three basic options that the developer could apply for:

- 1) Numerous small rezonings to allow for the general structure of the development they wanted. This option is unwieldy for all involved and doesn't really allow for master planning.
- 2) Rewrite of the Planned Development (PD) district ordinance to accommodate the development they wanted. This was a possibility, but as there are other areas in town zoned PD, the concern was over how a rewrite specifically for this project might affect other areas zoned the same way. Additionally, once a

zoning category allows a certain type of use or development, there is little legislative and public oversight/approval and much of the development can become a “matter of right” as opposed to something that must be applied for.

- 3) Apply for a new Planned Unit Development (PUD) category. This is a category specifically for large master planned communities and which also allows for much more dialogue, negotiation and conditions for approval than the other options allow for. If the town doesn't like a plan, it doesn't have to rezone the property.

So, with those options, it seemed a PUD would probably be the best way, for the town, to have a developer **apply** for their large project. A PUD seemed to be the best way to look at a specific property as a whole, allow for careful review of the details of a developer's plans, and not grant any rights until the public is heard and rezoning is approved- all while not changing the circumstances of the zoning or development rights on any other property in town.

So, you can choose to:

- 1) Believe the Council is good and ready to rubber stamp any PUD language and development proposal from the developer regardless of what the Planning Board says or does. It's a “done deal”, right?

**or**

- 2) At least consider the concept that the Council and staff felt a PUD was the best of the available options for this and other large projects to be **considered** by the town. It was **not** an endorsement of any specific PUD language or any specific development proposal. It was merely a preference as to how they might **apply**. It is the applicant's right to apply for any ordinance amendment, be it the three options mentioned above or anything else. They chose to go the PUD path.

If you always choose the worst, most malevolent, conspiracy-rich interpretation of a rumor, newspaper article, statement, etc., there's not going to be anything I can say to convince you otherwise. On the other had, if something sounds fishy yet you bother to ask for clarification or comment from the speaker or an involved party, perhaps you'll find that there is not the conspiracy or collusion that many seem to be so eager to believe is all around.

*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](mailto:Chris@ChrisSmithson.com)*