

A note from your friendly neighborhood Councilmember:

Most people at last night's planning board meeting were there to protest against the proposal for Pine Needles Village. As I share some of the concerns which have been stated by many of the opponents, I understand why they were there. Unfortunately, the concept of a Planned Unit Development (PUD) in general is being tied too closely with the specifics of the Pine Needles proposal. Those who are familiar with the two applications might find the content of the following passage somewhat familiar:

“The goal of this article is to promote a more traditional infrastructure and land use pattern that can be referenced in the downtown area of Southern Pines and surrounding residential neighborhoods. This area has a traditional grid street pattern, sidewalks, on street parking, parks and public facilities, a commercial core with associated multi-family and single family residential land uses. This pattern which promotes alternative traffic patterns, pedestrian friendly facilities and mixed land use is the goal... “

Most will probably be surprised to find that this language does not come from any applications before the town at this time. It comes from our existing development ordinance, section (180.4 Morganton Road Area Land Development Standards Intent). It begins with,

“It is the intent of this Article to provide development standards to the 500+ acres area zoned P. D. adjacent to both sides of Morganton Road from approximately the intersection of Fire Land Road West to the intersection of Pinecrest School Road. This area of predominately undeveloped property is under increasing development pressure.. “

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Since 1996, a “New Urban” or “Traditional Neighborhood Development” project has been possible in town and has been encouraged by policy and ordinance.

If a mixed use provision in our ordinance is a “bad” thing for Southern Pines, if it will “ruin” downtown, if it will “change the character” of our town, shouldn't Morganton Rd. be rezoned to something else like low-density residential? Though the process and amendment were well publicized, nobody spoke in opposition to the plan and it was carried unanimously by the Council, which included Mayor Quis and then-Councilman McInerney. Both have listed the Morganton Rd. area ordinance as among the things they are most proud of accomplishing while in the Council. They should be proud, but it has been ten years since the ordinance was passed, and it has remained relatively unchanged despite innovations and other towns' experiences in this type of development.

As it stands now, a developer could come in tomorrow and without much of an approval process start building a development on Morganton Rd. much like the one proposed by Pine Needles. There would be no level of detail as required in a PUD application. There would be no hearings to go over the overall plan and make changes before approval. It could just happen all on its own. This is exactly why we NEED a PUD provision on our

ordinance. Please, let's not let feelings about the Pine Needles proposal get in the way of passing an acceptable, modified, PUD ordinance for the benefit of the whole town. Southern Pines needs a PUD ordinance. It is clear it will not be unchanged from what the applicant has submitted. We need to make it work for Southern Pines, but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

Chris Smithson