

Residential Real Estate

Summerfield Council rejects Couch's bid for mixed development at Villages of Summerfield Farms

Email Share LinkedIn Share Tweet Share Article Print Order Reprints



A packed crowd filled the Summerfield Baptist Church Christian Life Center.
JOHN BRASIER

RECOMMENDED

By John Brasier - Reporter, Triad Business Journal
Feb 22, 2023

- IN THIS ARTICLE**
- Commercial Real Estate**
Industry
 - CRE Developers**
Topic
 - Housing Market**
Topic

Listen to this article 5 min

What will David Couch do with his 973 acres in Summerfield?

He won't be building apartments, a controversial component of his planned [Villages of Summerfield Farms](#) mixed-use development. Not anytime soon, anyway, he found out Tuesday night at a contentious Town Council meeting.

After listening to almost four hours of public comments – most against Couch's proposed text amendment to the town's UDO that would allow him to build 600 apartments as part of the development – Summerfield Town Council voted 4-1 against the amendment before a packed crowd at the Summerfield Baptist Church Christian Life Center. John Doggett cast the lone vote in favor of the amendment.

The outcome was hardly a surprise. Council had voted 4-1 last April to deny a text amendment to accommodate a Couch plan with 1,200 apartments. And amendment opponents showed up in force again Tuesday, comprising most of the 300 or 400 that filled chairs or stood along the walls, including all but a handful of the more than 90 speakers.

All three council members whose terms expire this year voted against the amendment. Doggett's term runs through 2025.

[The planning board voted 3-2 last month in support](#) of the text amendment.

The opposed speakers gave reasons ranging from a desire to maintain the rural environment they enjoy to concerns about traffic, schools, noise, crime, higher taxes and Couch's attempt to circumvent a Unified Development Ordinance adopted less than two years ago that does not allow for apartments and requires lots for single-family homes to be at least one acre. Several cited the low density as a primary reason they moved to the northern Guilford County town.

Others were concerned about ambiguity in the amendment and how the project would hold up after construction. Many held up red paper stop signs, cheered speakers against the amendment and booed the few speakers in favor of the amendment.

City staffers reminded the crowd that the text amendment was not linked to Couch's proposed community, and that it could be applied to other projects.

"We were pretty well convinced of how it was going to work out, but you've got to go down swinging," conceded Couch, a former Wake Forest University baseball player, when asked by Triad Business Journal after the meeting.

Though many speakers called for an end to Couch's attempts to include apartments in a development plan, Couch said his efforts to develop the property weren't over.

"Well, we're going to continue to work to find a way," Couch said. "We're obviously disappointed that a political decision was made over a leadership decision. We're in desperate need for affordable and available housing all throughout the county. This was an excellent opportunity with the world's best design. So we'll continue to explore all options."

Couch didn't reveal what his next option might include. Would he continue with the development without apartments, or sell to another developer?

"Everything is an option at this point," Couch said. "We're definitely keeping the property."

Couch, CEO of builder, developer and property manager Blue Ridge Cos. based in High Point, has owned property in Summerfield for more than two decades. He operates Summerfield Farms, which includes a market and an events venue. His plans for the Villages also included opening a farm-to-table restaurant in an old house across from Summerfield Farms.

Blue Ridge has built several apartment communities in the Triad, including [4 Farms at Horse Pen Creek](#), which opened a few months ago near the intersection of Horse Pen Creek Road and Battleground Avenue, only a 10-15 minute drive south of Summerfield. According to its website, Blue Ridge manages 11 Triad apartment communities.

Misty McCall, executive director of development for the Villages project, was one of the few speakers in support of the project. McCall argued that the crowd was not indicative of the sentiments of Summerfield's population of more than 11,000. She said she believed there was a "silent majority" in favor of the amendment who were intimidated from coming to the hearing.

Some of the proponents of the text amendment argued that Summerfield would change with time regardless of the vote, noting that the town is one of the largest in North Carolina without public water and sewer. They also noted that Couch could develop the land in accordance to the UDO, resulting in a cluster of non-connected cul-de-sacs without the amenities he has planned for the Villages.

Punchlines throughout the public hearing included many derisive comments about not wanting Summerfield to become like Greensboro and residents relating that they liked living in cul-de-sacs. Others noted that current market prices for apartments wouldn't necessarily be more affordable for many young adults.

The "garden-style" apartments were planned for the southeast portion of the Villages, just west of Summerfield Road, which runs parallel with nearby U.S. 220; and off Oak Ridge Road, separated by trees from Interstate 73, with Brookbank Road leading in from the south.

The entire development would consist of 11 "villages" with housing and some small neighborhood retail shops with roads connecting the villages and various walking and cycling trails. Summerfield Farms' retail would be preserved, and an old house across Pleasant Ridge could be converted into a restaurant.

McCall said the planned development would have "3,500ish residences," including the apartments and possible townhomes.

Couch has argued that the apartment portion of Villages of Summerfield, which would be in high motorist traffic areas of the development, would help the town meet state and federal fair housing laws while maintaining overall low density.