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# Summerfield dispute over major housing and retail project heads to Raleigh

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 **Bill O'Neil**   Reporter



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**SUMMERFIELD, N.C.** — One thing both sides of this dispute agree on is if this project does happen, it will change the way of life in Summerfield.

The big question is: What will lawmakers in Raleigh decide to do?

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"This is a question of protecting small towns in North Carolina. And you got to ask the question to the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many," said Summerfield Mayor Tim Sessoms.

"What people fail to realize when they have difficulty with change and difficulty with big ideas is that most of the very best things in their lives have always come as a result of big ideas for change," said David Couch, developer, villages of Summerfield farms.

The project involves nearly 1,000 acres in the heart of Summerfield. It would include a mix of housing and retail and bring water and sewer to this community of 12,000 people.

The town council rejected the plan twice, both times by a 4-1 vote. The main objection is over proposed apartments, 600 of them. Couch points out the need for housing. Summerfield Sessoms said the plan would overcrowd the roads and schools.

Despite the town's vote, Couch isn't giving up. He told WXII 12 News his best option now rests with state lawmakers who have the authority to de-annex his land from the town of Summerfield.

"I'm going to expose the facts of what we're trying to do here and how we're trying to help the overall community," Couch said.

WXII 12 News has learned the developer has hired lobbyist Tom Fetzer, the former mayor of Raleigh and former chair of the N.C. Republican party.

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He has also hired a former aide to Sen. Phil Berger, Pat Ryan as a public relations consultant. Summerfield is part of Berger's district.

The Senate leader has not taken a position on the project but released a statement saying:

"...What I do know is the Triad is attracting billions of dollars in new economic development and as our area continues to grow, additional housing is urgently needed..." said Berger's statement on Summerfield project.

The Summerfield mayor calls Berger the most powerful Republican in the state.

"If he supports this project, many have told us it's a done deal," Sessoms said.

Sessoms told WXII 12 News the Summerfield town council will meet Wednesday night for the purpose of hiring its own lobbyist.

The mayor said he worries lawmakers may attach Summerfield de-annexation to an unrelated bill that would go unnoticed until it's too late.

"What do you think about that?" WXII 12 News reporter Bill O'Neil asked.

"Well, as I guess, it's how things happen in Raleigh," Sessoms said.

"You're convinced that this project is good not only for yourself, but for this community," O'Neil asked.

"This project is good for this community because there are so many that would like to bring their children back to raise their families in the family in the community where they were raised," Couch said.

On Thursday, the Guilford co-legislative delegation holds a town hall meeting in Greensboro. Summerfield leaders say they expect a large turnout from this community.

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