

The Sun

**Groups await project ruling  
Association prepares its appeal to block 1,200-home Rouse plan**

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A Howard County circuit judge will review tomorrow a motion by a civic association opposed to the development of a Columbia-style village in North Laurel.

The Southern Howard Land Use Committee, an organization of about a dozen community groups, filed the motion last month after the county Zoning Board decided June 2 that the Rouse Co. could begin construction of a 1,200-home mixed-use project on more than 500 acres.

The hearing, scheduled to begin at 9: 30 a.m., comes a week after Rouse submitted a comprehensive sketch plan for the development of the North Laurel tract, known as the Key Property.

Greg Fries, who chairs the committee, scoffed at the traffic impact estimate in the plan, saying roads would be more heavily burdened than the Rouse Co. projected.

"Poppycock," he said. "I think it's still the typical traffic-study mumbo jumbo they want you to believe."

Neither Alton J. Scavo, a Rouse senior vice president, nor Todd D. Brown, an attorney with the law firm Linowes & Blocher, which represents Rouse, returned calls seeking comment.

The traffic study contends that the roads can accommodate the average daily traffic of 24,209 vehicles expected to be generated by the mixed-use community.

The study also states that despite county approval of eight other projects totaling 210 single-family detached houses and an estimated 3,019 more vehicles, the roads will handle traffic satisfactorily.

The Rouse plan calls for the construction of 450 single-family detached houses, 500 single-family attached houses and 250 apartments on the property, which straddles Interstate 95 and is bounded by Gorman Road on the north and Route 216 on the south.

Most of the units would be built west of I-95, buffered by stores and other new employers between the highway and the homes.

Joseph W. Rutter Jr., director of the county Department of Planning and Zoning, said the plan is incomplete. The proposal outlines only 395 of the 450 single-family detached houses and does not include a phasing plan.

"Obviously, something doesn't match," said Rutter. "I don't know what the answers are."

The proposal includes more than 1.2 million square feet of employment space. Retail and service space is estimated at about 100,000 square feet.

About 183 acres would be devoted to open space, and both parcels would include a focal point designed to link the employment areas to the residential aspects.

To win Zoning Board approval, Rouse agreed to refrain from developing any employment and commercial space not linked to a focal point on the western parcel until a loop road was completed.

Construction of the mixed-use complex wouldn't begin until 2000, and homes would be built at a rate of 120 a year over 10 years.

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Fries said the committee is asking Judge Diane O. Leasure to permit the organization to photocopy part of the eight months of Zoning Board hearing testimony. That would cut the cost of an appeal.

The board dealt with whether there was a change in the character of the surrounding neighborhood or a mistake in zoning the property for strictly commercial development, and with whether the preliminary development plan was appropriate.

Fries said the committee wants to focus solely on testimony regarding the possible mistake or change the argument in the appeal of the board's decision.

The board charges \$5 for each page copied for an appeal, so reproducing the transcript would cost about \$6,500, Fries said.

"What we're saying is that the PDP shouldn't have been an issue," he said, adding that he is unsure whether the committee could afford the entire cost. "The mistake or change should've been pursued first, and the cost really makes it impossible for citizens to challenge a zoning decision."

Deputy County Solicitor Paul Johnson, who represents the Zoning Board, said the panel is not opposing the committee's motion but doubts whether the court can uphold such a request.

"There are practical problems with doing that," Johnson said. "If the court grants it, someone is going to have to go through it and listen to the entire transcript."

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