

Final site plan approved for construction of 100 new town houses in Walnut Ridge

By Jeremy Arias | jarias@newspost.com | April 12, 2019

The final site plan to build 100 new town houses around a historic farm and cemetery in Walnut Ridge was approved earlier this week, opening a path for construction.

The plan details the construction of 100 new town houses and the retention of one single-family house already situated on the 18.8-acre lot just northeast of Walnut Ridge Park and west of Yellow Springs Road. The agreement between the city of Frederick and the developer will limit the new construction to about 10 acres of the land, while 5 acres will be ceded to the city as parkland and the remaining 3 acres will be used to help preserve historic elements associated with the nearby Rocky Springs School House and Chapel. Most of the historic elements of the site are on the Kemp Homestead, while Rocky Springs Cemetery, presumed to be one of the city's oldest active cemeteries, is next to the project site.

After reviewing the scope of the project at Monday evening's meeting of the Planning Commission, City Planner Marshall Brown recommended the commissioners approve the final site plan along with several modifications requested by the developers to the city's land management code.

Speaking on behalf of the applicant and developers, attorney Bruce Dean praised city staff and their cooperation in moving forward with the project, which he admitted was contentious at times.

"[City staff] have made sure that the city is properly protected, that the cemetery is properly protected and that the neighbors are properly protected," Dean told the staff and commissioners. "... It has been, in my experience, one of the more complicated projects for what is actually a relatively small piece of land, it's about 20 acres."

Dean pointed out that the developer made several concessions and agreements with the Rocky Springs Cemetery concerning



The final site plan to build 100 new town houses around a historic farm and cemetery was approved earlier this week, opening a path for construction along Rocky Springs Road adjacent to Walnut Ridge, near Rocky Springs Cemetery. Staff file photo by Bill Green

landscaping, fencing and signage around the historic site.

April Inskeep, an attorney representing Rocky Springs Cemetery Co., also took to the lectern later to confirm many of the agreements reached between the cemetery and the city as well as the cemetery and the developers. Inskeep mentioned that one concession made by the cemetery was the transfer of some land that will be used to build a public, city-owned shared-use path running through the lot and connecting the Walnut Ridge Park to the Walnut Ridge neighborhoods to the north.

While the cemetery provided some of the land for the path, the remaining land and construction will be shouldered by the developer, Dean said, pointing out the importance of connecting the park — previously accessible only by vehicle — to the nearby neighborhood and the rest of the city.

"You do have a developer providing a critical link in the shared-use path that would otherwise have to be paid for by the citizens of the city," Dean said.

City officials hope the shared-use path system will one day allow residents to travel throughout the city without having to drive, but only a fraction of the planned 20 to 25 miles of walking paths has been constructed to date.

While negotiations and concessions allowed the development to move forward, some early critics of the project simply did not wish to see the land developed. Sandra Johns, who lives next door to the lot, organized a Change.org petition in opposition to the project late last year to rally residents opposed to the site's development, often expressing concerns that the new development would increase traffic on local streets.

Johns did not attend Monday's hearing and declined to comment further on the project when reached by telephone on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Linda Stone, a coordinator for the local Neighbor-

hood Advisory Council who also lives near the lot, said she was resigned to the project moving forward, even though her first preference would have been to keep the lot undeveloped.

"I have no problem with [the project]," Stone said when reached for comment Thursday. "I would rather it remain open land. I think that's what we'd all like, but that's just not realistic."

Stone went on to say that she was satisfied that the developers and especially the city planners had listened to and tried to address the concerns expressed by residents. One frustration she noticed was how many residents waited until after most of the work was done and the master plan for the site was approved before stepping forward to complain.

"People just won't go out and speak up about these things until it's too late," Stone said, pointing out how almost early on the plan was presented to the NAC by both the developers and city staff. "Being realistic, the planners do have some expertise in these areas but they don't have a magic wand or unlimited funds to solve all the problems that even they can see, but they do the best that they can and I do think that they are very interested in getting as much input from residents as possible."