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BY JEFF BRANSCOME / THE FREE LANCE–STAR

After a lengthy public hearing Tuesday, the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors approved a 218-home development on part of the Chancellorsville battlefield off State Route 3.

The 25 people who spoke at the hearing were just about split on the 1,097-acre Legends of Chancellorsville subdivision.

The supervisors voted 5–2 in favor of the project, which will be on the north side of Route 3, about 1.5 miles west of the intersection of Route 3 and Elys Ford Road. Supervisors David Ross and Timothy McLaughlin cast the dissenting votes.

McLaughlin, whose Chancellor District includes the development, called it a “very good project,” but said his vote was based on feedback from constituents in his district. “Overwhelmingly, I’ve gotten emails and phone calls and petitions that opposed this project,” he said.

Ross didn’t say why he voted against the subdivision, which will be near National Park Service property.

The Planning Commission last month recommended approval of the development.

Tuesday’s public hearing reflected feedback at prior meetings.

Nearby residents expressed concerns about traffic and other issues.

Preservation groups and others lauded the developer, Fredericksburg-based Silver Cos., for offering to preserve hundreds of acres of historically significant land in the area.

But Marge Barrales, an opponent of the project, said the developer could have gone even further with its donation.

“Why doesn’t Silver donate the whole area to the Park Service?” she asked. “That would be a very simple solution to the problem. And I don’t think that Silver … is going to go into bankruptcy if they don’t develop this property.”

Alfred King, who lives in the Fawn Lake subdivision, said the pros of the development outweigh the cons.

“You’ve got to look at the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people,” he said. “And I think that the protection of the Civil War land really has a higher long-term priority than the short-term traffic problems on a Sunday morning when church goes out,” he said, noting that development will come “one way or the other.”

The Silver Cos. has agreed to give the Civil War Trust at least 420 acres of adjoining property in exchange for the project’s approval. That land is the site of Confederate Lt. Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s surprise flank attack during the Civil War.

And Silver plans to sell another 44 acres along Route 3 to the Civil War Trust, which would convey the property to the Park Service. That acreage lies within the congressionally designated boundary of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

The developer will also pay the county $13,000 per home, excluding the 10 homes that were already allowed at the site before the supervisors voted to rezone the land from rural to planned rural residential. Those cash proffers are supposed to help offset the impact of the additional homes on infrastructure such as schools and roads.

Mark Coombs of the Silver War Trust called the development a “trifecta.”

“It’s a boon for preservation, it’s a boon for positive growth and ultimately a boon for Spotsylvania County,” he said.

Others said the deal helped outside interest groups to the detriment of residents who live nearby. “My hope is that you’ll choose the visions of the locals and not yield to the power brokers of development,” resident Robert Howard said.
Meanwhile, the supervisors voted 6–1 to approve a different, 98-townhouse development that is also near NPS land. Supervisor Paul Trampe cast the lone dissenting vote.

That 25-acre project, which will also have three existing detached homes and up to 23,400 square feet of office space, will be on the west side of Benchmark Road near its intersection with State Route 2 and U.S. 17.

Two residents spoke in opposition to the project. Speaker Linda Conrad told the supervisors she was concerned the townhouses will be visible from Lee Drive. A National Park Service official has also raised concerns about the number of homes.

The developer, Lee Garrison, said the townhouses won’t be visible through the 100-foot wooded buffer at the end of Lee Drive, near the Meade Pyramid.

Garrison will pay a total of $600,000 in cash proffers, or a little more than $1 million less than current guidelines call for. Previously, just 21 homes could be built on the land.

The Planning Commission last month recommended approval of the development.

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