Normandy Shores zoning divisive issue

BY ANDREW MOORE
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SENECA — Seneca City Council is set to pass an ordinance on second reading Tuesday that would annex a 20-acre parcel of land near the Normandy Shores community on Lake Keowee and zone the land as planned development-undeveloped.

Council unanimously passed the ordinance on first reading during its July 7 meeting in a move that overrode the City Planning Commission's recommendation of an R-20 zoning, which restricts development to 20,000 square-foot single residential family lots. The Normandy Shores tract is one of five properties being annexed into the city. The four other properties will also be zoned as planned development-undeveloped, or PDU under the ordinance.

"If you think about it, this annexation (Normandy Shores property) isn't any different from the other four," Planning and Development Director Ed Halbig said. "There are no conditions specific to this property to request zoning any different than the other areas."

Some Normandy Shores residents, however, led by spokesman Bob Atwater, believe the city should have followed through on the Planning Commission's recommendation, as all other properties in the subdivision are zoned as R-20.

Halbig said a PDU zoning does not in any way give potential developers free license to build in any manner they choose. In fact, such a zoning would require future development to be authorized by the Planning Commission and City Council all over again before construction.

"With planned development-undeveloped, the council, Planning Commission and neighborhood have input on any proposed development," Halbig said.

At the heart of the issue, Halbig said, is the need to be able to adjust to the housing market's demands. An R-20 zoning would restrict a developer's options, regardless of what kind of housing for which there may or may not be a demand.

"I think we're going to be challenged with that same issue in Oconee County for years to come," Halbig said of meeting market demand with appropriate zoning.

With the PDU zoning option, Halbig added, there is nothing barring future development under R-20 should a developer seek it. It would also allow developers to maintain the current density in development while also using creativity to develop solutions for docking and traffic issues on the lakefront community.

Tuesday's meeting is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m., and will include the annexation and zoning of properties on Old Salem Road, North Debra Street, Frontage Road, Chartwell Point Road and Wells Highway.

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Residents of Normandy Shores disagree with Seneca City Council's decision to overrule the Seneca Planning Commission's zoning recommendation on an annexed property there.