

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Planning Commission

**From:** Maeve Gould, Planner I mgex

**Date:** February 16, 2018

**Subject:** RZN18-0001/ORD1859-Request to Rezone Approximately 6.483 acres from the GC General Commercial and R-4 Low Density Residential Zoning Districts to the PR Planned Residential Zoning District at 200 Dowdy Drive (Portion of Tax Parcel 317-14 4, 317-14 5, Portion of 318-15 3) by Steve Semones of Balzer & Associates, Inc. (applicant) on behalf of Jeanne Stosser of Main at Dowdy, LLC (owner)

**SUMMARY OF REQUEST**

<b>Property Location</b>	200 Dowdy Drive
<b>Tax Parcel Numbers</b>	317-14 5, Portion of 317-14 4, Portion of 318-15 3
<b>Parcel(s) Size</b>	6.483 acres
<b>Present Zoning District</b>	GC General Commercial and R-4 Low Density Residential
<b>Present Use</b>	Undeveloped
<b>Adjacent Zoning District</b>	<b>North:</b> GC General Commercial & R-4 Low Density Residential <b>East:</b> IN Industrial & R-4 Low Density Residential <b>South:</b> IN Industrial & GC General Commercial <b>West:</b> GC General Commercial & O Office (Across S. Main St.)
<b>Adjacent Uses</b>	<b>North:</b> Commercial & Single-Family Residential <b>East:</b> Cedar Run Pump Station & Single-Family Residential <b>South:</b> Industrial Park & Commercial (Undeveloped) <b>West:</b> Commercial & Offices
<b>Adopted Future Land Use</b>	High Impact Commercial & Park Land/Open Space/Resource Protection
<b>Proposed Use</b>	9 Studio Apartments & 100 Two-bedroom Apartments
<b>Proposed District Standards</b>	
<b>Maximum Height</b>	55'
<b>Minimum Setbacks</b>	Front: 45' Side: 20' Rear: 35'
<b>Maximum Density</b>	35 bedrooms per acre (227 bedrooms)
<b>Proposed Density</b>	209 bedrooms proposed
<b>Proposed Parking</b>	194 spaces (0.93 spaces per bedroom)
<b>Proposed Bike Parking</b>	Spaces for 52 bikes (25% of total bedrooms)

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## **OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND**

### *Development Proposal*

Steve Semones, of Balzer & Associates, acting on behalf of Jeanne Stosser of Main at Dowdy, LLC has filed a request to rezone three parcels totaling 6.5 acres located at the end of Dowdy Drive from General Commercial and R-4 Low Density Residential to Planned Residential for multi-unit residential housing. The applicant is proposing a single apartment building, with 4 stories above grade and one story partially below grade. The application, as filed, shows 9 studio apartments and 100 two-bedroom apartments, for a total of 209 bedrooms which equates to 32 bedrooms per acre. Recreational amenities including pool, grill station, pet parks and required open space are proposed behind the building. Leasing offices, a lobby/lounge and a fitness center will be interior to the residential building.

The proposed access to the project is from Dowdy Drive, a private road/driveway that connects to South Main Street. The building will be located approximately 375 feet away from South Main Street. The applicant is proposing 194 surface parking spaces (0.93 spaces per bedroom). Similar to the 2017 site plan, the applicant is requesting a special exception to allow 58 parking spaces in front of the front building line. Bicycle parking will be provided at the minimum ratio of 25% of bedrooms, with parking for 52 bicycles provided.

The location of the development is close to the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, whose students and employees are the target market for this development as indicated by the applicant. The applicant notes that there is a lack of housing on the south end of Town and more is desired based on the experience with the Knollwood development.

### *Previous Requests*

In 2017, the Town received a by-right site plan application for this same area, regarding the two subject parcels, for a hotel with multi-family residential above. The General Commercial zoning district allows up to 48 bedrooms per acre on upper stories of buildings. This site plan proposed one building with 25 hotel rooms on the ground floor, and four stories of 93 apartment units above (152 bedrooms / 23 bedrooms per acre). The Dowdy Drive Hotel/Multifamily proposal also included an application for a special exception to allow 58 parking spaces in front of the front building line, which was granted in a public hearing by Town Council on July 11, 2017. The site plan was subsequently withdrawn.

Other applications related to this property include a 2012 application for a development called Copper Beech that would rezone the subject parcels plus additional parcels not part of this request for a large purpose built student housing development. Due to a number of factors related to density, design, and topography the Town Council denied this application.

### **Existing Conditions and Context of Surrounding Area**

The surrounding area contains a mix of existing single family residential, office, industrial and commercial uses. As shown on the attached aerial the properties are located immediately adjacent to the Speedway Gas Station and Bojangles' restaurant on South Main Street. The Town of Blacksburg Cedar Run sanitary sewer pump station is located to the southeast. Overlooking the property to the northeast are the rear yards of single family homes and a church that front on Ellett Road. Adjacent to the southwest is a small commercial building at 2401 South Main Street which is occupied by primarily office tenants. Across South Main Street from the proposed development, the land is partially undeveloped wooded land, and there are also some office uses. Directly to the south is largely undeveloped, forested land. Further south, the Town of Blacksburg Public Works storage and equipment yard overlooks the property on a hill.

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The rezoning parcels do have topographic challenges. Please reference sheet Z2 in the application for existing conditions and contour lines to show the changes in topography. The rezoning parcels have a significant drop-off in the rear, due to the location of Cedar Run creek which bounds the parcel on three sides. The applicant owns the abutting property that lies between South Main Street and the proposed development. That parcel is also zoned General Commercial.

#### **CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION**

There are a number of analysis points for evaluation of a request to rezone a property within Town. The policies and maps in the Comprehensive Plan lend guidance to the Town's vision of growth in the future, while specific codes and requirements in the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, and the Town Code ensure that the development meets all applicable regulations. Specifically, the Zoning Ordinance calls out the criteria for evaluation of a rezoning request, as found below:

Section 1151 of the Zoning Ordinance requires the Commission to study all rezoning requests to determine:

- 1) *Whether the proposed amendment conforms to the general guidelines and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan.*
- 2) *The relationship of the proposed amendment to the purposes of the general planning program of the Town, with appropriate consideration as to whether the change will further the purposes of [the Zoning Ordinance] and the general welfare of the entire community.*
- 3) *The need and justification for the change.*
- 4) *When pertaining to a change in the district classification of the property, the effect of the change, if any, on the property, surrounding property, and on public services and facilities. In addition, the Commission shall consider the appropriateness of the property for the proposed change as related to the purposes set forth at the beginning of each district classification.*

Section 1162 of the Zoning Ordinance states that proposals for rezoning to a planned zoning district constitute an application for conditional zoning. Section 1160 of the Zoning Ordinance states that the owner of the land may proffer conditions, which may be accepted by the Town if they meet the following standards:

- 1) *The rezoning itself must give rise for the need for the conditions*
- 2) *The conditions shall have a reasonable relation to the rezoning*
- 3) *The conditions shall be in conformity with the Comprehensive Plan*
- 4) *The conditions must be clearly understood and enforceable*
- 5) *The conditions must not require or allow a design or standard that is less restrictive than the general provisions of this ordinance.*

Section 3110 of the Zoning Ordinance states the purpose of the PR Planned Residential zoning district:  
*The purpose of this district is to provide for the development of planned residential communities that incorporate a variety of housing options as well as certain limited commercial and office uses designed to serve the inhabitants of the district. This district is intended to allow greater flexibility than is generally possible under conventional zoning district regulations by encouraging ingenuity, imagination and high quality design to create a superior living environment for the residents of the planned community. The PR district is particularly appropriate for parcels which contain a number of constraints to conventional development. In addition to an improved quality of design, the PR district creates an opportunity to reflect changes in the technology of land development, provide opportunities for new approaches to home ownership, and provide for an efficient use of land which can result in reduced development costs.*

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### **EVALUATION OF APPLICATION**

This staff report is divided into topical areas of evaluation. Many of the overarching principles in the Comprehensive Plan, the Residential Infill Guidelines, and the Zoning Ordinance overlap into key topical focus areas. To aid in review of the staff report each topic or focus area is covered only once. The analysis is contained in the staff report. The pertinent text sections from the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance have been included as an appendix to this report.

#### **Intent of Districts**

There is a statement of purpose for each district in the Zoning Ordinance. It is the burden of the applicant to prove that the design submitted meets the intent of the Planned Residential District. The PR district is intended to be flexible in terms of standards and encourage creative site design. In all cases, applications are reviewed by the Planning Commission and Town Council for their merits on a case-by-case basis.

In some cases, a development application for a PR district provides the Town with a housing model or type that is not found elsewhere in town, such as the Shadowlake Village Co-Housing Community PR district. In other instances, the PR district allows an applicant to put forward housing for an underserved population and proffer limitations to ensure the need is met, as with the Grissom Lane Senior Housing development. A recently approved rezoning for Hearthstone proposed a rainwater harvesting system as a progressive water re-use technique.

Overall, the application submitted does little to demonstrate that this development is designed to meet the goal of the district to be imaginative or fulfilling a housing model that is not found elsewhere in Town.

The applicant indicates that the design is intended to meet EarthCraft green building standards but has not committed to EarthCraft certification. Part of the justification for the request is that there is a lack of smaller 1 and 2 bedroom units in Town and those unit types do add variety to the rental housing stock in Town. Without a proffered commitment to the bedroom types the project could develop with 3 and 4 bedroom units. The applicant also indicates that the project location of the development will appeal to a variety of residents such as those who work at the VA Tech Corporate Research Center and who attend the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. Despite the fact that the application states the target market is graduate students, medical students and young professionals, the development may also appeal to some undergraduates as well. The development is on a bus route that would provide easy access to the Virginia Tech campus.

The applicant does point out that the topography, location and lack of roadway visibility of the parcel makes it unsuitable and less marketable for commercial development under the existing zoning. The PR district does reference using PR to address parcels that have a number of constraints to conventional development.

#### **Development Standards**

The characteristics of physical site development are regulated by the Zoning District standards. In a Planned Residential Zoning District the applicant may propose most of the individual standards for the proposed development. The layout and standards of the development, if approved, are binding. Since the applicant proposes the standards in the PRD, the evaluation of the proposed standards is different.

The evaluation should be based on how well the proposed standards, when applied, fit into the existing character of the surrounding area. Thus while there is a great deal of flexibility in proposing almost all of the development's standards, the standards should not be so out of scale or character, or different from

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the various surrounding districts, as to create an incompatibility in use or through site layout. The Planning Commission and Town Council evaluate each Planned Residential development on its own merit.

The following table illustrates the proposed Planned Residential District standards for the Cedar Run Overlook development:

Proposed Use:	Multi-unit residential
Proposed District Standards:	
Maximum Height	55'
Minimum Setbacks	Front: 45'
	Side: 20'
	Rear: 35'
Maximum Density	227 bedrooms = 35 bedrooms per acre
Minimum Open Space	20%
Maximum Floor Area Ratio	0.45
Proposed Parking	0.93 spaces per bedroom

The applicant has applied to rezone to the Planned Residential District, but meets all the standards for the RM-48 Medium Density Multiunit Residential District, with the exception of floor area ratio and height. Thus while a multifamily project is proposed, the development could not be rezoned to the RM-48 district.

**Building Orientation, Scale, Massing, Height**

The building orientation, scale, massing, height, style and materials of a development are elements affecting how a proposed development fits into an existing neighborhood. The application, as filed, shows a five level development containing one 4-story apartment building, with an additional one story below grade, surface parking on all sides of the building, and recreational areas and open space behind the building. There are two different unit types: 9 studio units and 100 2-bedroom units, for a total of 209 units. The application states that 209 bedrooms are proposed, but the unit mix and number may change throughout the final design process, and the number of total bedrooms could increase to a maximum of 227. The building is oriented perpendicular to Dowdy Drive. Dowdy Drive will dead-end at the entrance to the building, and parking lot drive aisle loops around the building back to the front. Please also see the application for the master plan and conceptual building elevations.

The application states that the maximum height of the building will be 55'. Many of the surrounding uses, such as the gas station, offices and single-family homes are one story in height, with the exception of the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel which is slightly further south on Main Street and 4-stories tall. The Fairfield Inn that was recently approved near the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel has a proposed height of 60' (4-stories). Height in this area is also affected by the changes in elevation along Dowdy Drive and in relation to the elevation of adjacent parcels.

**Zoning district height comparisons:**

- R-4 Low Density Residential allows a maximum of 30' in height and additional height up to a total of 40' if an additional 1' of setback is added for every additional foot of height
- General Commercial allows a maximum of 60' in height, and up to 70' with an additional 1' of setback on all sides per foot of additional height
- RM-48 Medium Density Multiunit Residential allows a maximum of 35' in height, or 45' with an additional 1' setback per foot of additional height

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### Setbacks

Setbacks or required yards provide areas on a property that are to remain free from structures. This allows for both landscaping and open space around buildings for light and air circulation, but it also provides areas generally where public utilities may be installed. In many cases, public utility easements are established around the interior of lot lines, within the setbacks to allow for both Town public utilities, but also for private utilities such as telecommunications, gas, and power. The setbacks on a property also keep buildings from crowding one another across property lines.

The proposed minimum setbacks are 45' in the front, 20' on the side, and 35' in the rear and are greater than the surrounding R-4 zoning district (30' front setbacks, 10' side setbacks, 25' rear setbacks), General Commercial zoning district (10' front setbacks and no minimum side or rear setback) and Industrial zoning district (20' front setbacks, 10' side setbacks, 15' rear setbacks). In this case, due to the irregular shape of the parcel, the front setback is measured from the public street and the western property lines.

In the Special Exception Request portion of the application, the applicant discusses the distance that the development will be from South Main Street. This is separate from the setbacks listed above, but is relevant since South Main Street is where this development will be most visible to the general public. The portions of these parcels that will be rezoned sit 275 feet (at minimum) away from South Main Street.

### Buffering/Landscaping

There is no specific buffer yard requirement for the Planned Residential district as a whole because the nature of the proposed developments can vary so widely and the buffering proposed should be appropriate for the type and intensity and context of the development proposed. Each application is evaluated with regards to buffering to determine the appropriateness of the proposal as it relates to the surrounding uses and neighborhood, and whether the effects of proposed buffering mitigate any adverse impacts to the surrounding area.

Since there is no specific buffer or tree canopy requirement in the Planned Residential zoning district, each Planned Residential application needs to spell out the buffering and landscaping strategy proposed. The application does state that buffering and parking lot landscaping will be provided as specified in the Town Zoning Ordinance. Trees along the rear boundary will remain unless grading necessitates removal. The applicant will consider adding screening around the outer boundary of the site if adjacent property owners express concerns about buffering. While buffering has been shown on Sheet A1 which may relate to the buffering proposed as part of the previous hotel/multi-family design, the specifics should be incorporated into the Master Plan and addressed in the application text.

There may be a visual impact for the single-family houses on Ellett Road whose rear yards will overlook this development. The single family homes are located at a higher elevation than the subject parcels, and therefore it may not be possible to remedy the visual impact of the proposed development with buffering. On Sheet A1, the applicant is showing a row of evergreen trees and shrubs to mitigate the impact as much as possible and provide buffering to the residents of the development. Buffering is provided between the subject property and the adjacent commercial parcel under the same ownership.

The application does not specify a minimum canopy coverage in the application and this standard should be specified. For comparison, General Commercial requires 10% minimum canopy coverage, and the R-4 Low Density Residential zoning district requires 20% minimum canopy coverage. Landscaping has been shown on A1 to be provided around the front of the building and the front parking lot will be screened with evergreen landscaping.

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Lastly, the application states that streetscape, such as trees, lighting, and benches, may be provided along Dowdy Drive but no specificity has been given on these items. This is optional but would be a significant addition to the Dowdy Drive streetscape and staff would support streetscaping either as part of this development or with the development of the adjacent parcel should this ever occur.

#### Open Space

The provision of open space is another component of residential communities that is a requirement for nearly every type of residential development. The Planned Residential Zoning District Standards and the Use & Design Standards for Multifamily Dwellings §4216(a)(6) require a minimum of 20% open space for developments. It is important that the open space be meaningful in its size and function and geared toward the use of the residents who will reside in the development.

Sheet Z5 in the Appendix of the application shows the open space plan. The open space is primarily located behind the apartment building and includes recreational open space amenities such as the clubhouse, fitness center, pool, multi-use trail and pet parks. The open space plan shows that 38.7% of the total site will be open space, with 94,143 square feet of non-recreational open space and 15,249 square feet of recreational open space. The non-recreational, non-paved open space makes up 33% of the total site. While the percentage provided is in excess of the minimum required, a good deal of the open space is land that is not otherwise developable containing the creek and steep slopes and should remain as open space regardless of the development proposed.

#### Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements

Many individual policies and regulations address streetscape, bike and pedestrian improvements as being a high priority to encouraging walkability and contributing to a high quality of life in Town. Providing enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities will encourage alternate-transportation behavior and lead to less dependency on personal vehicle trips. These facilities may include wider sidewalks, separation between the street and the sidewalk with a vegetated buffer strip, covered bike parking, and other elements to provide a pleasant and safe streetscape experience. Often, private development serves an important role in providing missing links in the sidewalk and trail network throughout Town, as there is not enough funding within the Town's budget to complete all the sidewalk projects as the Town grows.

#### *Proposed Sidewalks and Trail*

In the attached application, the Master Plan shows sidewalk connecting the parking lot in front of the building, along Dowdy Drive and to the existing sidewalk on South Main Street. The Master Plan also shows sidewalk around the outside of the entire apartment building, as well as a trail in the rear that connects the parking lot and pet recreation areas. The application indicates that there will be cross access from the front parking area to the rear parking area of the 2401 South Main Street building, but does not indicate that an agreement has been reached with the owner of this property.

Town engineering staff expressed concerns with the multi-use trail/path to the rear of the apartment building that connects the pet recreation areas. Building Code requires that all amenities be ADA accessible, however, the grade for the path will be over 20% in some locations and it is shown as compacted gravel surface rather than paved. The Town traffic and transportation engineer suggests that a pet recreation area be either relocated or added that is ADA accessible.

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#### *Paths to the Future /Corridor Committee*

There is a portion of trail on the Paths to the Future map (see the Comprehensive Plan map in the Appendix) that passes directly across this proposed development, from north to south, as well as a V-shaped portion that connects from Ellett Road to Commerce Street. The Corridor Committee has reviewed this application and recommended that rather than having a path that goes directly across this parcel, consideration be given to a future path that follows Cedar Run creek, along the outer perimeter of this parcel. The Committee also recognized the accessibility challenges that this parcel presents for a multi-use trail, due to the topography and elevation changes caused by Cedar Run creek.

In addition to the comments on the recreational trail, the Corridor Committee also discussed and expressed concerns with residents who live at this development that may desire to bike, walk or take transit to nearby shopping and dining, the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (CRC) and the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. Crossing South Main Street is not safe unless pedestrians and bicyclists cross at the signalized intersections at Ellett Road or Professional Park Drive. Often pedestrians and bicyclists take the most direct route even if it is not the safest route. The biking distance from the end of Dowdy Drive to the CRC, using sidewalks and bike trails is roughly 1.3 miles.

Corridor Committee members and Blacksburg Transit staff have expressed concerns that bus riders may be unlikely to stay on the bus for the extra 1.5-mile ride and are more likely to attempt to cross the 4-5 lanes of traffic on South Main. If a resident at the proposed development needs to ride the bus southbound on South Main Street or use pedestrian paths to get to the CRC and College of Osteopathic Medicine, they may also attempt to cross South Main Street mid-block where there is no cross-walk. The Committee suggested that it is unlikely that pedestrians and bicycle commuters will travel the extra distance to traffic lights to cross South Main Street where there are crosswalks. The closest crosswalks to the development are located northbound on Ellett Road, 0.5 miles away, and southbound at Professional Park Drive, 0.3 miles away. Both of these intersections contain pedestrian actuation buttons. Town policy expressly prohibits crosswalks at the proposed development location with the current configuration of South Main Street. Crosswalks midblock are allowed and recommended only if there are two or fewer traffic lanes, and a speed limit of 25 miles per hour or less which is not the case in this instance.

#### *Transit*

There are three Blacksburg Transit bus stops located near this proposed development; however, there is no direct Blacksburg Transit service to the CRC or the College of Osteopathic Medicine which the applicant has indicated are likely tenants in the development. One transit stop is on the northbound side of South Main Street (bus stop #1639), about 500 feet north of Dowdy Drive and just past Highland Tree Care, LLC. There are two on the southbound side of South Main Street, one in front of Moog (bus stop #1643) and the other just before Southpark Drive near the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel (bus stop #1644). The application states that Blacksburg Transit bus riders who are southbound can remain on the bus until it turns around at the Industrial Park, and exit the bus when it returns to the bus stop near the development. It is important to note that the South Main Street transit route provides service to the Industrial Park turn-around during daytime and weekdays only (Monday through Friday from 7:00am to 6:30pm). But on evenings and weekends, the transit route only goes to Ellett Road, which is 0.5 miles away from Dowdy Drive.

Additionally, Blacksburg Transit is considering relocating the northbound transit stop ("Main/Dowdy Nbnnd" #1639) nearest to the proposed development, to the turn lane at Dowdy Drive. This would equate to a move of about 400 feet south, so that the stop would be south of Dowdy Drive and closer to the development. For those traveling southbound on transit wishing to remain on the bus through the turn-

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around at the Industrial Park, this would reduce the time spent on the bus to less than at the current bus stop location. This possible new location would also be more convenient for passengers traveling northbound from the development. The applicant is proposing to add sidewalk on the southern side of Dowdy Drive, which would cause the potential new bus stop location to be more accessible by residents at the proposed development.

#### *Bike Parking*

Multifamily residential developments are required to provide bicycle parking at a minimum of 25% of the total number of bedrooms. Cedar Run Overlook will provide bicycle parking meeting this minimum ratio for a total of parking for 52 bicycles. These bicycle parking areas will be spread around the development in about 5 different locations, with some bicycle parking near each door to the building. The application states that some amount of covered bicycle parking may be provided in the stairwells of the building, however, no indication is given whether there is space or adequate lighting in the stairwells to provide this. Users prefer bicycle parking that is covered and well-lit due to weather, up-keep, functionality and security concerns. Covered bicycle parking is especially appealing for residential uses because users are often storing bicycles long-term.

#### **Traffic and Circulation**

A VDOT Traffic Impact Analysis is not warranted with this project, due to the number of residents (209) and the estimated number of daily trips generated (692 total per weekday). The main access to the development will be from South Main Street through Dowdy Drive. There will also be two secondary access points. The first is onto Dowdy Drive through the Speedway-Bojangles' parking lot, which also has an entrance on South Main Street. The second is the cross access from the front parking area to the rear parking area for the 2401 South Main Street building, which has an entrance on South Main Street south of the development. There is no median break on South Main Street at Dowdy Drive, so drivers needing to turn left and travel southbound on South Main Street will need to turn right and make a U-turn at the second median break 0.2 miles away, just past the Moog office building. There is a median break at the entrance to the 2401 South Main Street building, so utilizing the cross connection from the proposed development through the rear of this commercial building is another way to turn left onto South Main Street, though not desirable due to grade change and narrow parking lot configurations at 2401 South Main Street.

Due to the lack of a median break on South Main Street at Dowdy Drive, those traveling southbound on Main Street to access the development will likely turn left into the Speedway-Bojangles' parking lot, cross the parking lot and turn left onto Dowdy Drive. Another option will be to make a U-turn or left turn at the 2401 South Main commercial building. The locations of the median breaks on South Main Street were designed in 2002 using VDOT standards and field and traffic conditions at the time. Traffic counts were performed during the planning stages, and median break locations were determined based on this data. A median break was not located at the intersection of Dowdy Drive because it was undeveloped and not a traffic generator. In order to add a median break at Dowdy Drive, an existing median break nearby would need to be eliminated so that VDOT standards for median break distances can still be met. This likely would involve eliminating the median break at the entrance to Draper Aden Associates and the Speedway-Bojangles'. The application does not indicate that the owner is initiating any discussion of changes to the location of medians at this time.

#### **Parking**

The Planned Residential District allows applicants to choose a parking ratio that is different from the standards in the Zoning Ordinance with information to indicate why the proposed ratio is appropriate and

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will not have any negative effect on surrounding uses. The standard ratio is 1.1 parking spaces per bedroom for multifamily, two-family, and townhouse developments. This standard was designed primarily in response to the parking demands associated with multifamily housing geared toward students.

However, in certain situations, a different ratio may be appropriate given the development's proximity to transit, the University, retail services, or the target market demographic. Providing the right amount of parking for a development is critical for the safety and convenience of the development's residents, but also for the safety and convenience of the surrounding neighborhood. Without adequate parking, residents and guests may overflow into other neighborhoods, where there may already be pressure for parking due to the rental tenancy, or small lot size. The Town is also concerned about developments that may be over parked adding unnecessary impervious surfaces. The goal is "right-sizing" the parking for each development to accommodate residents and guests.

The applicant is proposing a parking ratio of 0.93 spaces per bedroom based on the proximity of transit stops and trails/public sidewalks connecting to the CRC and nearby shopping and dining at First & Main and Blacksburg Square. This will equate to 194 spaces for 209 bedrooms. The applicant proposes all surface parking, and it is not designed as a single block but rather is broken up and provided on all sides of the building.

*Parking Special Exception*

As part of this rezoning, the applicant is requesting a special exception to allow 58 parking spaces in front of the front building line. The front building line is in relation to South Main Street. The development technically has public road frontage on South Main Street in order to meet the requirement for public road frontage but does not have a relationship to South Main Street. Dowdy Drive is a private street/driveway but the front building line determination is based on South Main Street and not Dowdy Drive.

The request equates to about 30% of the total parking spaces. According to Sec. 4216 of the Town Zoning Ordinance, all parking spaces for multi-family dwellings should be located behind the front building line. Parking lots located behind the front building line are preferred because they orient buildings to streets which encourages pedestrian and bicycle use and eliminates the view of large parking lots from main thoroughfares. However, the Zoning Ordinance also states that Town Council may grant a special exception to this parking regulation as authorized by Sec. 1112. The reasons and justifications for the special request given in the application include: lot characteristics, existing and planned structures, internal/external connectivity, consistency with existing development patterns, and buffering. If the special exception is granted, the parking would be located 275 feet away from South Main Street. Refer to the table below for the parking proposals for both the 2017 by-right site plan and this rezoning application.

	"Dowdy Drive" 2017 By-Right Site Plan	"Cedar Run Overlook" 2018 Rezoning Application
Spaces in front of front building line	58	58
Total Parking	194	194
Standard	125	126
Motorcycle/Scooter	4	4
Compact	57	56
ADA	8	8

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A previous special exception request (SE17-0001) was granted for 58 parking spaces in front of the front building line at a public hearing by Town Council on July 11, 2017 when the site was intended for a by-right development as a hotel with multi-family above. In determining to grant a special exception, the Town Council should be guided by the following considerations: an unusual shape or topography of a lot, the location of existing structures and whether mature trees can be preserved through the exception. Considerations may also include the degree of exception requested, the impact on the relationship of the building to the street, internal/external connectivity, safety concerns and consistency with existing development patterns.

#### **Density & Occupancy, Appropriateness of Use**

The General Commercial Zoning district is designed for a variety of commercial uses, both pedestrian and automobile oriented. The intent of the district is to allow for more intense commercial uses than the Downtown Commercial district, but in a way which is consistent with the Town's small-town character. An important goal of this district is to create a vital and lively streetscape with windows and entrances oriented to the street and to provide needed goods and services to the community.

The density of the development proposed is also a factor in considering whether the proposed development is appropriate to the surrounding area. The proposed density for the entire site is approximately 32 bedrooms per acre, which is less than the maximum for the current General Commercial zoning of 48 bedrooms per acre. The Planned Residential zoning district does not have a maximum allowable density.

For a comparison of other multi-family residential densities, The Retreat has 829 bedrooms/approximately 20 bedrooms per acre, The Reserve at Knollwood has 600 bedrooms/approximately 29 bedrooms per acre, and the recently approved Sturbridge Square has 1,052 bedrooms for 88 bedrooms per acre. There have not been many applications filed in this mid-sized market. Many recent Planned Residential developments have been either very small and site-constrained, or large-scale student-oriented developments.

#### **Loss of Commercial Land**

Staff is always concerned about the loss of available commercially-zoned and designated land along arterial streets and within commercial corridors. However, Planning Commission and Town Council should evaluate the loss of commercial land on a case-by-case basis. The trend to use commercial land for residential uses is primarily driven by the pressures of the student housing market. With a growing student and non-student population, the need for retail and commercial services will also continue to grow. Commercial and service uses for the population should be able to occur in areas that have already been established as having a location and infrastructure to support these uses, which is reflected in the Future Land Use designation.

The Town's commercial land use policy has specifically been to stimulate redevelopment of older commercial areas with new commercial development. This policy has been successful and addresses the fact that there are not many suitable areas for new greenfield commercial developments. The potential loss of this land to residential zoning will limit the available land for further commercial development. However, the portion of Tax Parcel # 317-14 4 that fronts South Main Street is not part of the rezoning and will remain General Commercial.

The loss of commercial land at this particular location is tempered by the location and topography of the parcel. The Town does have a need for non-student housing to meet a wide range of market demands

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including recent graduates/young professionals; young faculty, starter families; and workforce and low- and middle-income housing as there are fewer opportunities for available housing to meet their needs.

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

### **Comprehensive Plan Map Series Evaluation**

In evaluating whether the proposed use conforms to the general guidelines and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan, all applicable sections of the Plan should be included in the review of the application in addition to the map series.

### **Future Land Use Designation**

The subject property is designated High Impact Commercial and Park Land/Open Space/Resource Protection on the Future Land Use map. High Impact Commercial is defined as:

*Small or large commercial developments with a need for high visibility and have a high impact on the surrounding environment, including but not limited to factors such as lighting, noise, parking, traffic and hours of operation. Examples include large retail establishments, restaurants, hotels/motels, and auto related uses.*

Park Land/Open Space/Resource Protection is defined as:

*Public recreational space or dedicated public or private open space.*

The existing General Commercial zoning is consistent with the High Impact Commercial designation. The High Impact Commercial designation does not contemplate any specific residential uses or density. Allowable density in a High Impact Commercial designation is the density allowed for in the implementing commercial zoning districts. The definition of High Impact Commercial stated above is not entirely conducive to the commercial development of the parcels of land requested for rezoning. Commercial development could have greater impacts on lighting, noise, parking and traffic that may not be compatible with the nearby single-family homes and church that overlook this development to the east and northeast.

Park Land/Open Space/Resource Protection can occur in any zoning district. This designation in this location reflects the presence of the creek and steep slopes in the area. Although the land would be zoned Planned Residential if the rezoning is approved, a large portion of the land designated for future Park Land/Open Space/Resource protection would remain non-paved open space as part of the PRD Master Plan.

### **Mixed Use Areas**

A portion of the property is located within Mixed Use Area F which is located along South Main Street at the major south entrance gateway to the Town. This mixed use area is predominantly offices and commercial campuses with limited entrances on South Main Street. The Comprehensive Plan states that "Retail and residential uses are secondary in nature and should support the Blacksburg Industrial Park and existing office parks. Attention to aesthetic and architectural details are important in this mixed use area since it is visible from the Route 460 Bypass and is part of the southern gateway entrance to Blacksburg."

The boundaries of Mixed Use Areas are not intended to be hard lines of demarcation, but rather a general depiction of a broad area. Mixed Use Areas have been designated to outline the areas where there is a desire to have a mix of residential and non-residential development and redevelopment, with access to arterial roads, public utilities and transit. It is not anticipated that every property in the Mixed Use Areas should be developed with a mix of uses. Site-specific characteristics as well as market conditions can guide

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the development of properties, but not all sites are appropriate for a mix of uses, and not all uses are appropriate to mix with others.

About 2/3 of the subject property that is in Mixed Use Area F is not part of this rezoning and will remain zoned General Commercial. If this rezoning is approved, it would contribute to the residential and commercial mix in this area, as there are few multi-family residential options in this area. Additionally, if the subject parcels are developed as multi-family residential and the parcel along South Main Street that is not part of this rezoning (front portion of Tax Parcel 317-14 4) is developed at a later date as commercial, then this area would contribute to a mix of both residential and non-residential uses on these parcels.

#### **Urban Development Areas**

Two of the three subject parcels (Tax Parcel 317-14 4 and 317-14 5) are within Urban Development Area F. These are the two parcels that are closer to South Main Street. The designation of UDA does not prevent developments outside a UDA, nor obligate the Town to approve rezoning or conditional use permit applications within a UDA. The designation of a UDA does not affect zoning, nor does it mandate a specific type of development.

#### **Neighborhood, Employment and Service Areas Map**

The subject parcels are located primarily within the "Suburban Residential Neighborhoods" designation and abut the "Employment Areas" designation to the north, west and south (the Industrial Park and the CRC). The Comprehensive Plan states that these uses will be considered in large planned residential developments and should not generate additional traffic from outside the area.

#### **EVALUATION OF IMPACTS**

In evaluating the potential effect on public services and facilities that this rezoning would have, the Town Engineering department has reviewed the Master Plan and application and the following comments are provided.

#### **Sanitary Sewer**

Town engineering staff has reviewed the application with respect to sanitary sewer and has several comments for the applicant to address to meet specific engineering requirements for the sewer system. These can be addressed at the site plan stage. There are not anticipated to be any issues that would impact the layout of the design as proposed. The town's sewer model indicates that there is adequate capacity to accept flows from the proposed development.

#### **Water**

Town engineering staff has reviewed the application. There is adequate capacity to serve the proposed development. There were no other comments.

#### **Stormwater Management**

The application submitted included a stormwater management concept plan. The plan has been reviewed by the Town's stormwater engineer and has been approved (see attached letter).

#### **Traffic & Transportation**

Town engineering staff reviewed the trip generation data provided as a part of the application and has no comments. Other than the inability to make a left turn at the main entrance at Dowdy Drive and no signalized left to exit the development, which are discussed at greater length in the Traffic and Circulation section above, there are no further traffic concerns as a result of the proposed development. Engineering

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staff comments on the trail were included in the Sidewalks and Trail section of this report.

#### **NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

A neighborhood meeting was held on February 7, 2018. Please see the attached meeting notes and sign-in sheet for more detail.

#### **SUMMARY**

The Planning Commission is asked to consider and make a recommendation of approval or denial of the proposed Rezoning request. If the request is approved, the property will be rezoned Planned Residential with any proffers offered by the applicant and accepted by Town Council. Any changes to the master plan would be required to be reviewed through the public hearing process to amend this PR district. If denied, the property will continue to be zoned General Commercial and R-4, and any such subsequent development application will have to adhere to all the minimum standards found therein. The decision to grant or deny the rezoning request is a discretionary decision, and should be made according to the criteria outlined in §1151, and with the analysis provided.

#### **PROFFER STATEMENT**

The applicant has submitted a proffer statement dated January 3, 2018. Two items are proffered. The first is to commit to the development as described and illustrated in the rezone application dated January 3, 2018. The second is to commit to architectural materials that are cohesive with surrounding buildings and existing developments in the area.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Staff Appendix  
Stormwater Concept Plan Approval Letter  
Staff GIS Maps  
Neighborhood Meeting Notes & Sign-In Sheets  
Application dated January 3, 2018

## **RZN18-0001 Cedar Run Overlook PRD**

### **Staff Appendix**

This appendix is provided to give additional supporting information from the Comprehensive Plan, the Residential Infill Guidelines, and the Zoning Ordinance in order to allow the staff report to focus on the analysis of the application.

### **Physical Site Development**

#### Building Orientation, Scale, Massing, Height

- Comprehensive Plan Land Use Policy LU.6 Consider the compatibility of development with surrounding uses. Utilize strategies such as landscaping or other buffering techniques along with modification of site design to minimize impacts and facilitate compatibility
- Multifamily Dwelling Use & Design Standard for building orientation §4216 (a)(3):
  - The street elevation of the residential buildings shall have at least one (1) street-oriented entrance and contain the principal windows of the front unit.

#### Setbacks, Lot Coverage, Buffer Yards & Landscaping

- Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principle 16: Responsible site design and development practices will minimize environmental impacts within the town
- CCP.22: Gateway entry corridors are the first impression for visitors and residents and should reflect the care and quality of the Town. The Town will provide landscaping and maintenance, and entry and wayfinding signage within the right-of-way at key gateways. Development proposals in gateway corridors should be designed with aesthetic features such as parking areas, landscaping, and signs, all of which affect the visual quality of entrance areas and corridors.
- Comprehensive Plan Environment Objective EN.17 As a part of the development review process, the Town will evaluate a proposed development's impact and proposed mitigation measures for the following:
  - Open Space
  - Urban forest canopy
  - Viewsheds
  - Mineral Resources
  - Cultural Resources
  - Threatened Endangered Species
  - Watershed
- Comprehensive Plan Sustainability Objectives & Policy S.6: Promote, protect and enhance the Town's urban forests through Town initiatives and in the development review process. Minimize site disturbance to protect existing tree canopy, native vegetation, and pervious surfaces to encourage open space.

### **Streetscape, Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements**

- Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principle 1: Well-designed pedestrian and bicycle friendly routes and facilities are essential to the Town's identity as a walkable and bikeable community.
- CCP.14: Transit connections and bus stop facilities are important components to support transit as a viable transportation option in town. These elements should be part of the design of new

- developments and be coordinated with Blacksburg Transit regarding service availability.
- Comprehensive Plan Transportation Objective & Policy T.10. Complete the construction of a connected sidewalk system:
    - Include sidewalks on both sides of the road in all publicly-funded, new road construction projects
    - Require the inclusion of sidewalks or multi-purpose trails in all new subdivisions
    - Consider requiring sidewalks on both sides of the street in infill areas with high pedestrian traffic
    - Minimize curb cuts
    - Pursue new sources of funding for sidewalks
    - Ensure the sidewalk system is ADA accessible
  - T.11: Minimize pedestrian and vehicular conflicts by:
    - Implementing crossing signals at all signalized intersections
    - Maintaining sidewalks and streets
    - Educating drivers on yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks
    - Ensuring appropriate signage, lighting, markings, and other physical improvements are made
  - T.12: Maintain and improve the aesthetic quality of the pedestrian environment by planting street trees and other landscaping, and installing street furniture where appropriate.
  - T.15: Develop a bikeway system that minimizes potential conflicts between bicycles, pedestrians and motor vehicles; conduct regular maintenance of existing bicycle lanes; provide appropriate signage, lighting, markings, and other physical improvements; and promote safety and education through Virginia Tech as well as the Town to create a safe and convenient bicycle network for all.
  - T.16: Develop and implement a comprehensive bicycle parking program throughout the Town and in coordination with Blacksburg Transit to install covered bicycle racks at public sites and commercial and residential locations, as well as to coordinate with Montgomery County and the New River Valley Planning District Commission for bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the region.
  - T.17: Investigate implementing a bike share program
  - T.20: Monitor the public transportation provided to ensure effectiveness and efficiency while maintaining the priorities of safety, courtesy and scheduling.
  - T. 22: Enhance transit accessibility and convenience; lower parking demand, energy use, and air pollution by reducing traffic on local roads; and educate the community on the positive environmental impact from using public transit in order to encourage its overall use throughout the Town.
  - T.27: Increase the number of covered bus shelters and covered bike parking provided at transit stops where appropriate.
  - T.28: During the development review process, ensure that transit service and access to/from the transit stop and the development are provided.
  - Comprehensive Plan Environment Objective EN.34 Support citizens in establishing and reaching vehicle travel reduction goals to reduce air pollution.
    - Request telecommuting and flex time policies from employers
    - Car-pool and combine trips

- Walk, bike and use public transit
- Utilize services available online
- Consider vehicle travel costs and impacts when making housing choices
- **Multifamily Use & Design Standard for sidewalks §4216 (a)(2):**
  - Sidewalks shall connect each unit to the parking area serving that unit, to other units onsite, and to other buildings or uses on adjacent lots.
- **Site Development Plans Minimum Standards and Improvements Required §5120(d)(1):**
  - Sidewalks meeting the design standards of the Subdivision Ordinance shall be provided on public or private land along all parts of a site abutting a developed public street where such sidewalks do not exist as of the date of the application for site plan approval. The provision of these sidewalks will advance the goal of the Blacksburg comprehensive plan of development of “a network of walkways in the Town to increase the safety and convenience of pedestrian travel.” The Town Council finds that the need for such sidewalks in this Town is substantially generated by the development

#### **Parking and Circulation**

- **Comprehensive Plan Transportation Objective & Policy T.50** The development review process ensures:
  - Surface parking facilities are landscaped and appropriately lighted
  - Structured parking facilities are designed to minimize the visual impact of the bulk of the structure and the horizontal appearance of a parking deck
  - New parking lots minimize impacts on stormwater
- **Multifamily Dwelling Use & Design Standards §4216(a)(4):**
  - All parking spaces shall be located behind the front building line

#### **Density & Occupancy, Lifestyle Conflicts, and Affordability**

- **Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principle 2:** Lifestyle conflicts are inherent in a college town, where neighborhoods may have a mix of students and non-students.
- **Comprehensive Plan Land Use Objective & Policy LU.7:** Encourage developers to work with surrounding property owners and tenants to resolve community concerns prior to formalizing development plans.
- **Comprehensive Plan Jobs & Housing Objective & Policy J&H.37** Market Blacksburg as a place for young professionals to live and work. Survey young professionals currently living in Town as to what jobs and housing opportunities need to be available to attract young professionals.
- **J&H. 48:** Plan for the housing demands of a changing and diversifying population
- **J&H. 51:** Promote varying types of housing types needed, including:
  - Rental or starter homes for purchase by graduate students and young families
  - Young professional housing and services in the Downtown area
  - Workforce housing for those making 80% - 120% of AMI
  - Affordable workforce housing options for LMI families making less than 80% of AMI
  - Housing with universal design features to allow aging-in-place
- **Comprehensive Plan Sustainability Objectives & Policy S.8:** Support the New River Valley Livability Initiative coordinated by the NRV Planning District Commission and other regional efforts.

### **Loss of Commercial Land**

- Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principle 9: With limited availability of commercial land, efficient use of the land is critical to provide services to a growing population. Redevelopment of aging commercial centers is the most significant opportunity to meet this need. Residential development should not encroach in these areas unless incorporated as part of a well designed mixed use project.
- CCP. 12: To serve the needs of the community, support opportunities for commercial development and redevelopment in appropriate locations.

### **Open Space**

- Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principle 6: Creation of public and private parks and recreation amenities is an important part of land use development decisions
- Comprehensive Plan Environment Objective EN.3. Conserve, protect and manage networks and corridors of natural vegetation, forested areas, wildlife habitat, and undeveloped steep slopes.
- EN.4: As part of the development review process, ensure that natural resources, including native habitat and threatened and endangered species, are protected.
- EN.26: Open space is the preferred land use in fragile terrain. As part of the development review process, the Town will:
  - Prohibit development in wetlands
  - Restrict development in riparian buffer zones
  - Restrict development in Creek Valley Overlay
- Multifamily Use & Design Standard for open space, recreation, and trails §4216(a)(6)
  - Except in the Downtown Commercial (DC) district and the Mixed Use (MXD) district, for any development of twenty (20) or more bedrooms, a minimum of twenty (20) percent of the gross land area shall be reserved as open space. A specific recreational activity area or areas shall be developed and maintained for the residents of the development as a part of this open space

Sunday, February 04, 2018

Balzer and Associates  
Attn: Steve Semones  
448 Peppers Ferry Road, NW  
Christiansburg, VA 24073

RE: **RZN18-0001 Cedar Run Apartments PRD Rezoning (Dowdy Drive)**

Dear Mr. Steve Semones:

The Engineering Department has completed the review of the Cedar Run Apartments Planned Residential Development Stormwater Concept Plan. The Concept Plan is **approved** at this time. This site is located at the end of Dowdy Drive behind the existing Bojangles/Speedway commercial site. This site is bounded on three sides by Cedar Run and tributaries. This site has previously been submitted to the planning and engineering departments under the title "Dowdy Drive" with project number STP17-0002. The previously submitted project was not approved, but has undergone two reviews where the ability to meet the concept level stormwater management requirements has been addressed. The Town has remaining administrative requirements for this plan, but these can be addressed at the site plan phase. The approval of this concept plan does not invalidate any comments previously provided at the site plan stage, it simply demonstrates concept level approval for the purpose of the rezoning process.

Please contact Kafi Howard with the Engineering Department at 961-1124 or via email [khoward@blacksburg.gov](mailto:khoward@blacksburg.gov) if you have questions or concern regarding this review. If you would like to schedule a post review meeting please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Kafi Howard, Town Engineer – Stormwater, (540) 443-1354

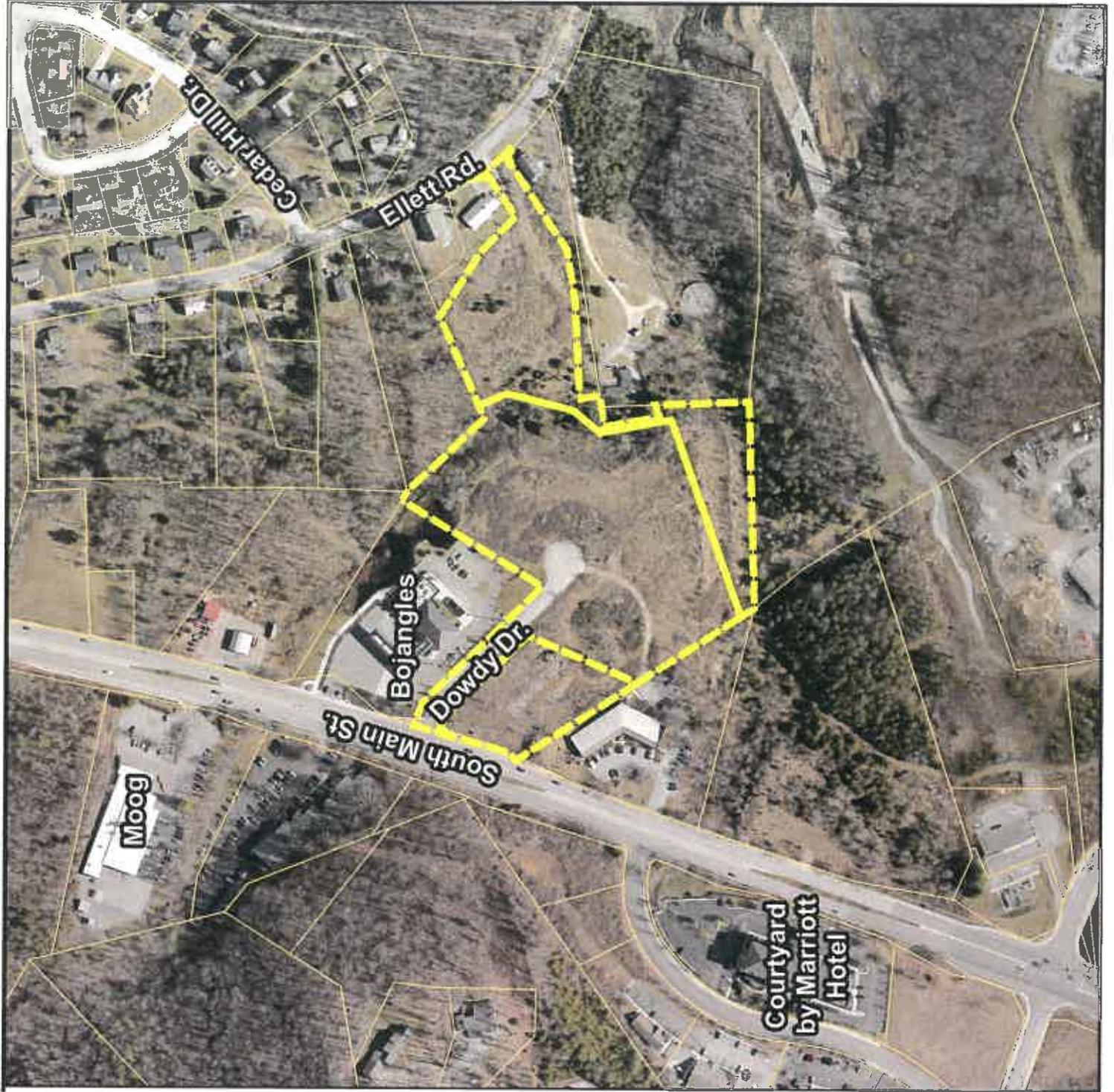


**RZN18-0001  
Cedar Run Overlook  
Apartments PRD**

-  Subject Properties
-  Parcels



**Blacksburg**  
TOWN OF  
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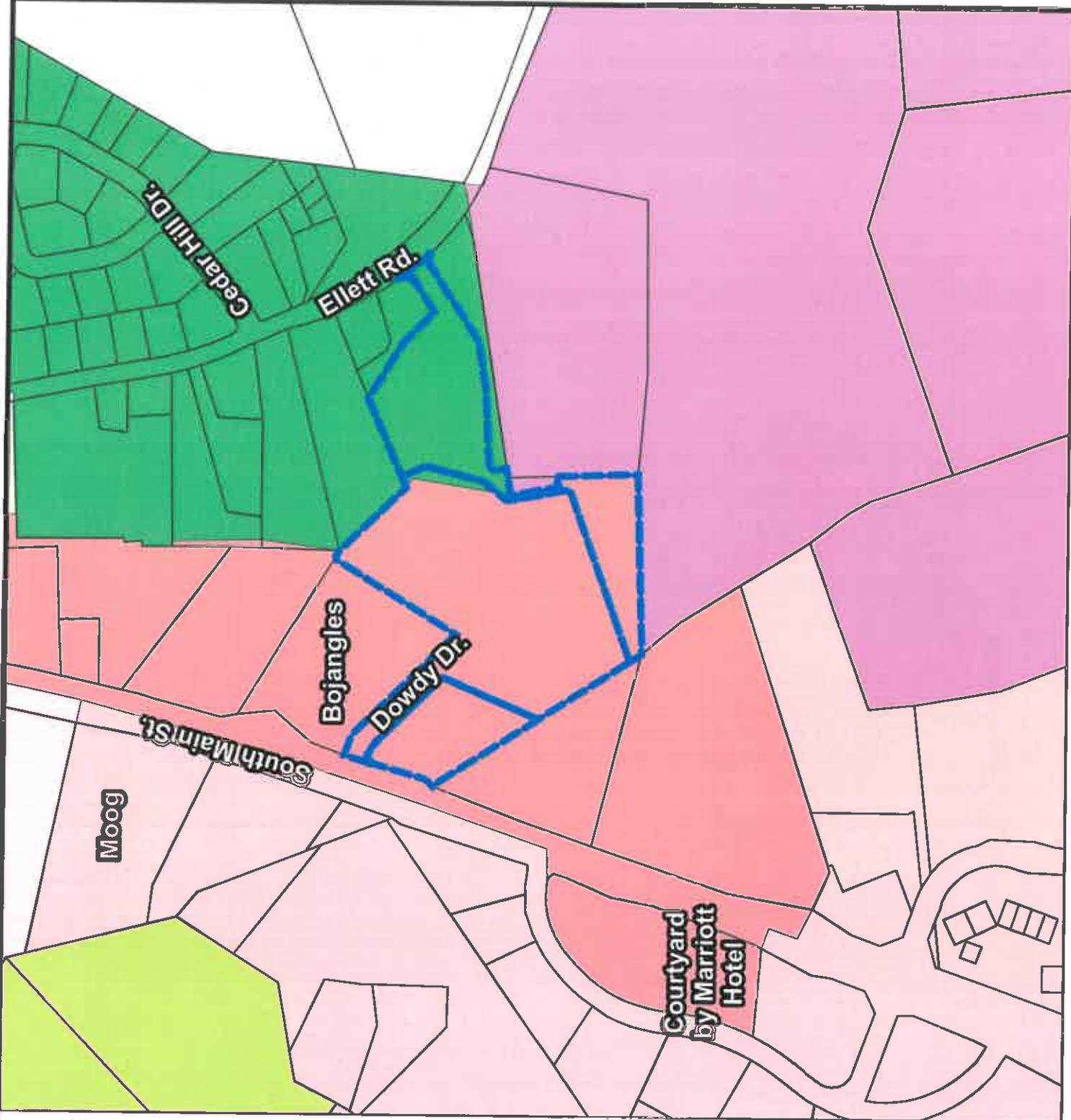




**RZN18-0001  
Cedar Run Overlook  
Apartments PRD**

**Current Zoning**

-  GC General Commercial
-  IN Industrial
-  O Office
-  PR Planned Residential
-  R-4 Low Density Residential
-  RD Research and Development
-  Subject Properties
-  Parcels

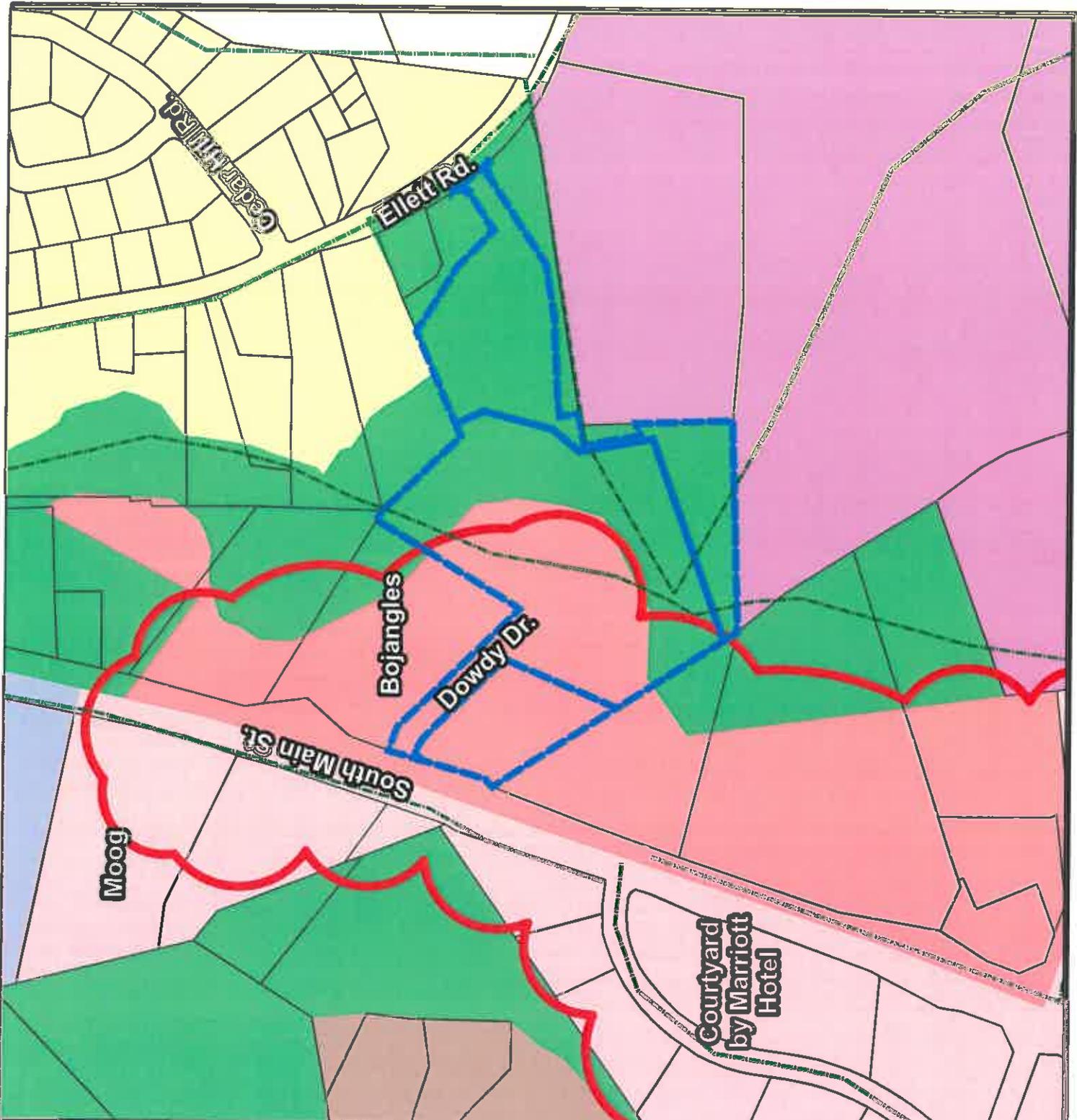
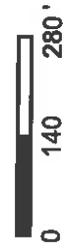




**RZN18-0001  
Cedar Run Overlook  
Apartments PRD**

**Comprehensive Plan  
Map**

-  Low Density Residential
-  Medium Density Residential
-  High Density Residential
-  Park Land / Open Space / Resource Protection
-  Low Impact Commercial
-  High Impact Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Paths to the Future
-  Subject Properties
-  Mixed Use





RZN18-0001-Cedar Run Overlook Apartments

Neighborhood Meeting

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

5:30 pm

Town Staff in attendance were Maeve Gould, Anne McClung, Kasey Thomsen. Steve Semones of Balzer and Associates and Jeff Stosser were representing the applicant and Tim Colley was in attendance as a member of the Planning Commission.

The meeting began at 5:34 pm.

Maeve Gould began the meeting by explaining the Town of Blacksburg's role in reviewing and processing the application and the timeline and meetings proposed to discuss and decide on this application.

Steve Semones spoke about the prior planning history of the property, the currently proposed request and the details of the project, and opened the meeting for questions. Those in attendance had questions/ comments or concerns regarding the following items:

A citizen asked if there will be a modification to the median at Dowdy Drive.

A citizen inquired about the distance from the proposed project to the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center.

A citizen wanted to know the location of the stormwater pond and the stormwater details for the project.

An attendee asked about the elevation between the parking lot and the proposed stormwater pond.

A citizen asked that since the applicant is applying to rezone to PR, is this why they are asking for a special exception to allow for parking in the front of the front building line? Another citizen stated that Town shouldn't make this a requirement since there is no public street.

An attendee asked how this will affect Ellett Road residents.

A citizen stated that people from Ellett Road will be able to see the property.

A person asked if Dowdy Drive is a private road.

A person inquired about the proposed maximum height of the buildings.

An attendee asked how many bedrooms are proposed.

A citizen wondered how the applicant determined this project will be attractive to those working/attending the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center.

A person inquired if these would be rental units only.

A citizen asked if there will be any walking/fitness trails and where could they tie into existing systems if available.

A citizen inquired if there was any existing agreement with the adjacent Jim Lucas property in terms of trail access and/or the cross-connection through his parking lot.

An attendee asked if parking needs to be increased due to the proposed lower parking ratio.

A citizen inquired further whether the parking spaces will be smaller.

An attendee asked if the parking requirement depends on access to public transit (Blacksburg Transit and other forms).

An attendee inquired how this proposed project compares to Knollwood in terms of parking ratio and residency.

A citizen asked if there are any plans to put overflow parking on Dowdy Drive. They expressed concern about people walking across South Main Street.

A person asked if there will be gas or electric utilities.

A citizen stated they were very concerned about stormwater runoff during construction.

An attendee asked how much of the development will be visible from South Main Street?

A citizen stated that the site is visible from South Main Street at Dowdy Drive so there could be some commercial if the developer wanted to do it.

There were no more questions. The meeting ended at 6:35 pm.



