

Hollymead expansion approved

By Jeremy Borden

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The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors on Wednesday unanimously approved a large expansion of a development just north of Charlottesville.

Supervisors also were scheduled to discuss Biscuit Run, which, at 3,100 units, is the largest residential development the county has considered. However, at 10 p.m. the board had not yet begun its discussion.

That's because the meeting's first four hours were lengthy discussions of the continuing expansion of Hollymead Town Center and a plan for the future of Pantops Mountain.

The board approved more than 1,200 housing units to go along with 278,000 square feet of commercial space for the burgeoning area at Hollymead Town Center.

Supervisors seemed determine not to let what one called a community eyesore happen again. The Town Center area – known for its Target and Harris Teeter – is the site of what has been dubbed the "moonscape," a denuded area of red clay that has sat vacant for years as development around it has cropped up.

That construction work has been partially blamed for filling up Lake Hollymead, a large regional lake nearby. Jim Grace, of the Forest Lakes Community Association board of directors, said his neighborhood hired a consultant to do a study on the lake.

"If we continue to get the type of sediment that we're getting, we will lose 30 to 35 percent of Lake Hollymead," he said.

Supervisor Dennis S. Rooker tried to push the developer to offer money for taking sediment out of the lake. Seeing nothing forthcoming, he voted in favor because the developer's lawyer, J.P. Williamson, offered to work with Forest Lakes residents to work out a payment agreement.

"I take him to be a man of his word," Rooker said.

The board also deferred a decision on the Pantops Master Plan.

The plan provides a guideline for area development and redevelopment, as well as what roads might be needed in the next 20 years.

Much of the discussion centered on two properties, those owned by Jack Vermillion and Dr. Clara Belle Wheeler.

Wheeler's property, 77 acres in the northeastern part of the area, has been recommended by county officials to be taken out of the county's designated growth

area because of its effect on area roads and its natural beauty, among other factors. However, Wheeler says she wants the county to keep her property in the growth area.

"I don't know what tomorrow will bring," Wheeler said Wednesday. "I know that I can take care of that property. I don't know what someone else would do."

Vermillion wants the exact opposite for his property, he said. He asked the county about 25 years ago not to include his land in the growth area – and it remains outside the growth area today. However, now things have changed.

"At that time we were out in the country," Vermillion said of his 25 acres. "Now [development is] wrapping around us like tentacles of an octopus."