

The Capital South County

Deale center plan draws fire from residents

By E.B. FURGURSON III Staff Writer

About 400 people last night crammed into Cedar Grove Church in Deale to hear an Annapolis-area developer's plan to create a 22-acre retail and residential center.

If the reception to the plan was any indication, developer Walt Petrie and his partners will have to go back to the drawing board to get the public support they want before proceeding with the project.

Some entered the church's sanctuary opposed to the project before it was even presented, others solidly supported it, and a good many kept an open mind until they heard the details.

Mr. Petrie presented a plan for Gates Marina, about 183 residences, 75 of which would be age-restricted, and retail space totaling 59,400 square feet. The plan also features a 100-foot-wide swath of park along the waterfront.

The land is owned by longtime Deale resident Tommy Wellons.

Though the residential figures were lower than an earlier plan, the sheer numbers of homes took many aback, even the property owner.

"I was surprised, there was more development than I thought," Mr. Wellons said after the meeting. "Originally it was not that involved."

The retail plan includes a 20,000-square-foot grocery store, bank, drugstore, medical building and other retailers along Deale-Churchton Road. A bike path and plantings would create a buffer between the development, pedestrians and traffic.

"This is a concept designed to eliminate fragmented and hodge-podge development," Mr. Petrie said.

He said it was made to bring the Deale/Shady Side Small Area Plan to life. But some thought it moved beyond what the planning document recommended.

"The (Small Area Plan) sought to avoid that type of townhouse density," said Bobby Sturgell, who sat on the panel.

That plan suggested the site could become a recreation center for the community with park areas, water access, retail space and a community center.

But Mr. Sturgell and others praised Mr. Petrie for seeking community input on the project.

Community cooperation is also something Mr. Wellons desired.

"I want to be a good neighbor. You have to run it up the flagpole first."

Mr. Petrie brought in Landover-based Washington Homes to work with him on the project.

Nishan Topjian, senior land acquisition manager for Washington Homes, recommended 108 townhomes with no age restrictions, and 27 townhomes and 48 condominiums for seniors.

But they would not say how many stories the townhomes would be or the price range.

The plan could change to include more age-restricted housing, which is more profitable, Mr. Petrie said. But a commitment can't be made unless a market study reveals support for that much senior residential in the area.

Deale merchant Claire Mallicote, who supported the plan, said she was surprised to hear it was not all age-restricted.

"I don't think a mix of housing will fly," she said.

The development would change the heart of Deale, now a mix of retail and marine businesses and open fields, into a retail destination center. That's a notion some consider a positive boost to a sagging local economy, while others consider it the end of a sleepy waterside village.

Before the meeting, lifelong Deale Beach resident Robert Kidd thought the project was too big for Deale.

"They're trying to jam a huge development up (in here)," he said. "It's a shame to do all this. Once they open the door, this place will be like Edgewater."

Robin Browning, president of the Deale Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary, said she was in favor of the development.

"If they can get the homes they should go for it," she said. "And the stores would be nice, too."

By the end of the night, the crowd was split roughly three to two against the proposed plan, with about a fifth of the crowd still undecided.

Mr. Petrie said he will now sift through the public's input and try to reach a decision in about two weeks.

"We are going to regroup," he said.

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