

Dunlora residents voice opposition to additional development on Rio Road
written by Newpack Team | June 27, 2019



Dunlora residents do not want development near them, at least for now.

More than 450 residents of the neighborhood have signed a petition to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission protesting further development on East Rio Road.

Then, on Tuesday evening, about 50 Dunlora residents gathered at the Planning Commission meeting to oppose a rezoning for 999 E. Rio Road from R-4 to Neighborhood Model district. At issue was increased traffic and road safety.

Jennifer Mathis, a Dunlora resident and Dunlora Board of Directors representative, urged the commissioners not to look at this proposal in isolation.

"You have a lot of other projects in the pipeline," Mathis said.

Site developer Nicole Scro, of Gallifrey Enterprises, said that she intends to create more housing options for the region.

Set to be located at the intersection of Belvedere Boulevard and Rio Road — at the main entrance of the Belvedere Development — the complex would be a combination of an apartment building and small

single-family houses set around a courtyard. The development is intended to feature between 16 and 46 houses and apartments and commercial space.

Adjacent to the Dunlora neighborhood, the property is across Belvedere Boulevard from Covenant Church and across Rio Road from Charlottesville Technical Education Center.

Scro said a traffic study found that the proposal would generate between 108 and 151 trips during peak hours, assuming maximum buildout. County staff member Tori Kanellopoulos verified that the proposal did not meet the threshold for a formal traffic impact analysis.

Staff found that Scro's proposal is consistent with Albemarle's Places29 Master Plan, a section of the county's Comprehensive Plan, aside from affordable housing requirements that Scro said she would resolve before the Board of Supervisors vote. The land use map in the plan envisions between six and 34 units per acre on the property; Scro is proposing a density of eight to 24 units per acre.

Without a rezoning, Scro could build seven to 11 units on the property. Scro revised the building height from four to three stories after receiving community feedback.

"I do want to be sensitive to people who live around that area," Scro said, "and make sure that we are something that is helpful to the community as well as sensitive to those around us."

Scro offered immediate neighbors a say in the landscaping that would screen her development from Dunlora.

Dunlora residents referred to the county's Comprehensive Plan during the public hearing and in the petition, particularly the goal of "preserving the character of existing neighborhoods." (The rest of the goal is "while improving the quality, diversity and affordability of new housing.")

The Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document for the county required by law and creates development areas to protect the county's rural areas and natural resources.

Charles Kelly, of the Arden Place Apartments on Rio Road, was an anomaly amongst the public commenters. He was the only resident to speak in support of favor of Scro's proposal.

Kelly stated that he struggled to find housing within his price range when he moved to Charlottesville.

Ultimately the commissioners voted, 4-1, to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that the rezoning be approved. Commissioners Bruce Dotson and Pam Riley were not in attendance.

Commissioner Daphne Spain voted against the proposal, saying she was impressed by the public's turnout and was cognizant of their concerns.

"I am trying to listen and hear the younger generations that are talking about the real challenges that they are facing in the housing markets today," Commissioner Tim Keller said.

The Planning Commission also voted unanimously to request that the board review traffic and transportation in the Rio Road area. On the other side of Dunlora, Kotarides Developers is proposing nine apartment buildings across East Rio Road from Dunlora Drive with a maximum of 328 units. The rezoning proposal has not yet gone to the Planning Commission yet.