

RST Proposed Development: Important Update

(Revised based on RST June 1 amended resubmission – changes noted in red)

After the community's extensive and wide-ranging critique of the developer's proposal in March, RST has submitted a revised plan – available on www.forestlakes.net/announcements for developing the parcel at the corner of Ashwood Boulevard and Route 29. **Information on how you can comment on the new proposal is included below.**

The new plan addresses several of our concerns – improving the aesthetics along Ashwood Boulevard including retaining the existing berm and tree screening and reducing the number and density of townhouses along the western edge facing Ashland. **RST increased the tree buffer for Ashland from 20 feet (which was really nothing) to 40 feet – vs our request for 100 feet - and took out a few townhouse units – based on Forest Lakes noting the error in their resubmission – where the townhouses were actually closet to Ashland than they had been before.** RST also added more green space and amenities as desired by the county.

But: this is still a very dense development at **332** units. RST took out just 30 units (9%) in their resubmission, **and another 8 in conjunction with the amendment as noted above,** which will not reduce the serious potential traffic problem at the Ashwood stoplight.

And the RST update is actually worse than the initial proposal in several ways:

- **Townhomes are now shown as 55 feet tall, including chimneys** – well over the 45-foot maximum level allowed in this area (though one top floor unit has been taken out to provide a slight visual transition for Ashland – though since Ashland residents face the 'end' of those buildings it really has minimal value). For reference this is nearly a 45 degree angle – half way up to the sky if you are looking straight ahead.
- **Apartment buildings are actually taller than before** – the prior 3 story buildings are now 4 stories, resulting in a dense cluster of (3) 4-story and (2) 5-story buildings (65 feet tall) with over 250 units. This is the densest and tallest set of buildings anywhere in the area and is unprecedented, way out of scale for our residential area and a terrible precedent. The County would need to provide waivers for these heights to be allowed.

The potential for significant traffic problems remains – with morning rush hour back-ups of 400 feet – up to 10 minutes - at the Ashwood stoplight to go south on 29, based on a traffic study that Forest Lakes and Hollymead commissioned. The developer still asserts there will be no effect, despite **332 units – 600 or more** cars? – from RST and a potentially substantial level of traffic coming up to Ashwood from the connector road being built from Brookhill. RST cites a traffic study which we believe is fatally flawed and just does not pass a reality check based on local knowledge. Frankly, there are just too many new dwelling units proposed, overloading the intersection and inappropriately degrading the quality of life for the 800+ homeowners in Forest Lakes South.

Density is a thorny issue of course, and we recognize that this site will ultimately be developed. While RST's overall density (at about 18 units per acre) falls within the range (6-34) that had been set out in the Places 29 plan some years ago (RST is quick to point this out), no one really knows where that range came from, and seeing how incredibly dense even 18 units per acre really is, in this the first modest size parcel being redeveloped in the area, there is a need to

revisit and adjust these guidelines, which we expect the County will be doing over the next several years – not helpful in the current situation though. The Crozet community has recognized the same issue, having suffered the effects of recent overdevelopment – and they

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are proposing new limits of 2-12 units per acre (which is applied here would be about 220 units – versus the 332 now proposed – a **thirty percent** reduction that would go a long way toward easing the traffic and other problems in the RST proposal.

We are continuing to detail our concerns to the developer, but so far have not achieved any significant improvements.

Your Board and the team that has been involved to date urges that this revised proposal be rejected by the Planning Commission and the developer go back to the drawing board yet again, and make substantial changes in the plan to truly address these major issues.

As we have said all along, we are not opposed to development on this site. Rather, it needs to be done responsibly and taking into account the needs of the 6000+ people who already living here.

RST has proposed a major affordable housing component to the apartments in this plan – with 75% of them available for workers at 60% of local average income, for 30 years. This is an unprecedented proposal which the developer seems to believe will carry the day in getting approval.

While the need for added affordable housing is clear, there is significant debate about whether having apartment complexes that are highly concentrated with affordable housing is desirable public policy – vs the ‘standard’ county requirement that 15% of units in new developments be affordable, basically spreading out the affordable units and creating diversity in each new development. PS: 8,000 new units have already been approved by the County, mostly in the 29 North corridor – yielding 1200 new affordable units. Your board is not taking any position on this issue – focusing rather on the overall density, regardless of who lives there.

YOU HAVE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD:

The Planning Commission will be considering the revised RST plan on Tuesday, June 15. Your board and selected community members who have spoken before will again be commenting in depth before and at this meeting.

You can send your written comments to planningcommission@albemarle.org

We expect you can also sign up to speak at this meeting as well (3 minutes – which flies by – we recommend you focus on just a single ‘issue’ and concisely provide both your thoughts and the action you want the Commission to take). Instructions for signing up to speak will follow later.

If you plan to either send written comments or sign up to speak at the meeting, please email manager@forestlakes.net and just indicate your topic or key points, just so that we can keep track of what is going to be covered (and what we might need to supplement). Thank you.

Scott Elliff, FLCA Board member

Questions or more detailed comments? scott@ducardvineyards.com or 434-409-4378
anytime.