

Branner Station is approved – with only two ‘yes’ votes

By Greg Pearson
STAFF WRITER

On a most unusual vote last week, the Chesterfield Board of Supervisors approved the very large Branner Station rezoning on a vote of 2-1 with two abstentions.

Bermuda Supervisor Dickie King motioned for approval which was seconded by Matoaca Supervisor Renny Humphrey, and those two supervisors, who are not running for reelection, became the necessary majority.

Dale Supervisor Kelly Miller opposed the rezoning, and Midlothian Supervisor Don Sowder and Clover Hill Supervisor Art Warren abstained. All three are running for reelection next month.

“The three people running for office ducked,” said one observer at the board meeting who declined to be identified.

Both Sowder and Warren chose to abstain, indicating they wanted more time to study the case. Miller explained his “no” vote by saying he was concerned about the 25 homeowners who would be impacted when an east-west freeway is built outside of Branner Station by developer HHHunt. If the homeowners refuse to sell their properties for the price offered by the county, their homes will have to be taken through condemnation. “I’m very sympathetic to them since condemnation would be for a road built by a private developer,” said Miller.

In addition to the two supporting supervisors, there was a Who’s Who of endorsements from the county led by Transportation Director John McCracken, who described HHHunt as a model developer for the county to work with. “They couldn’t have been better,” he offered.

“With inflation, these roads could cost \$130 million for us to build,” added McCracken. “There’s no money from VDOT [Virginia Department of Transportation] to build this road network, and I don’t think there will be in my lifetime.”

Development attorney Jim Theobald said HHHunt will build over \$70 million in offsite road improvements and \$40 million within the development. Because private developers can build roads for less than the government, Chesterfield estimated that value at \$78 million, more than if Branner Station paid the maximum proffer of \$15,600 per home. The road improvements will be phased in ahead of each section of the community, and HHHunt is responsible for the full cost of the roads, regardless of what the improvements cost.

Bermuda District Planning Commissioner Jack Wilson strongly supported the case in his district. Two years ago, he told the developer upfront that roads and schools would have to be right for this project to be approved.

Bermuda School Board Member Marshall Trammell endorsed the rezoning, saying he and the school system are happy to receive 117.5 acres for a new high school and elementary school.

The planning department recommended approval, but cautioned that the developer isn’t paying the full proffer for schools, fire stations and libraries. Theobald countered that the total contribution was at least \$88 million in proffers, \$10 million more than the maximum.

Though the staff report listed shortcomings in design, buffers and adequate parking, Planning Director Kirk Turner recommended the rezoning.

Sixteen citizens, mostly from the Chester Village Green community, opposed the rezoning. One citizen gave the board a petition with the signatures of 283 residents who wanted the rezoning turned down. Their major complaint was the north-south road from Branner Station to Chester Road that would likely replace the Chester Linear Park, green space now maintained by the Chesterfield Parks and Recreation Department.

McCracken said the CSX railroad right-of-

way for the park had been purchased by the county as a future four-lane roadway and only used temporarily as a park. “We knew that was going to be a problem,” he explained.

“Where is the public involvement?” complained county resident Jackie Sawyer.

“If I wanted to live in an urban environment,” protested Darlene Sweat, “I would have moved to one.”

Speaking for the Chester Civic Association, Bill Bishop said, “We feel it’s better to master plan this large area. The improvements to the transportation system outweigh its disadvantages.”

“HHHunt is a quality developer,” said State Senator John Watkins. “This is a unique opportunity for Chesterfield County.”

Branner Station is expected to become the largest planned community in the Richmond metro. Located on 1,614 acres southeast of Chester, HHHunt Vice President/General Manager Dan Schmitt said his company plans to start building homes in 2009. Over 20-25 years, Branner Station would include 2,449 single-family homes, 1,331 condos and townhouses, 908 apartments and 300 assisted living units.

“The alternative is for the 1,600 acres to be developed in an adhoc fashion over time without the infrastructure,” said Theobald.

The school system plans to hold a bond referendum in 2012. If approved, an elementary school would open in Branner Station in the fall of 2014 and a high school a year later. At build-out, Branner Station will generate about 2,644 students.

The proposal also includes 470,000 square feet of office and retail development on two sites totaling 169 acres.

The development uses “smart growth principles,” which incorporate residential, retail and office together to reduce automobile travel.

Hull Street Road rezonings

The board unanimously approved two rezonings for more commercial business on Hull Street Road across from Harbour Pointe. The 12.5-acre site just east of Mocking Bird Lane was rezoned to community business on the condition that an additional eastbound lane would be paved in front of the property. It wasn’t reported what will be built there.

The board also approved rezoning 7.9 acres just west of Mocking Bird Lane for a Tripps Restaurant – also on the condition that an additional eastbound lane would be paved in front of the property.

Beach Road

The board approved a 51-acre site for 38 single-family homes off Beach Road between the Gates Bluff community and Pocahontas State Park. The developer will pay \$594,624 in cash proffers.

Jefferson Davis Highway

The board approved 105 homes on 39 acres behind the Winchester Green Apartments in the Jefferson Davis corridor. The single-family homes will be “attached, detached and park tracts” and pay proffers of \$1,643,000 for the impact to schools, roads and other services.

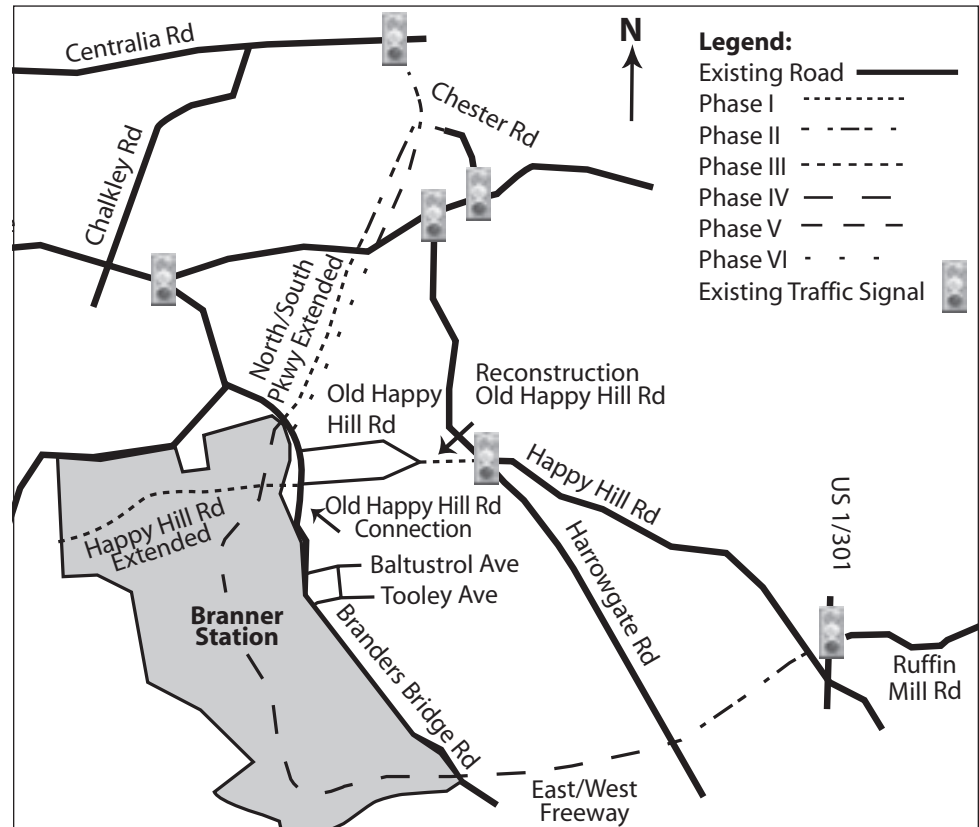
Happy Hill Road

The board also unanimously approved 53 single-family homes on 31 acres off Happy Hill Road across from Fielding Road. The Doran Development will pay \$829,344 in proffers.

Normally, Chesterfield requires a second access for neighborhoods with more than 50 homes, but the board waived this requirement.

Brandermill

The board agreed to a 30-day deferral request from the Brandermill Community Association (BCA) to amend its zoning application from over 30 years ago after the planning department discovered the community has less open space than required by zoning.



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

By agreement, developer HHHunt has to build the road network (above) for Branner Station as the planned development grows to almost 5,000 homes.

The BCA hired attorney Will Shewmake to review the revised language. Supervisor Warren also wanted to give the association time to respond to e-mails circulating among members that question the proposed changes.

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Friday
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3460 Pump Road
- Richmond**
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