

Growth prompted land-use planning

Key development projects got the green light; money for a detective, deputies did not

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WALKERTOWN

A growth spurt brought on by a sewer system continued during 2005 as the town made plans to guide future development with a land-use plan.

The town had to "de-annex" about 25 acres that were taken into the town limits by mistake. On Dec. 1, 2003, the town had annexed the land at the end of Conestoga Trail in the Winchester subdivision.

Town Manager Toby Linville later learned that Kernersville had plans to annex that tract.

There is no formal de-annexation procedure, so the town asked for special legislation in the N.C. General Assembly to have the land taken out of the town.

The annexation agreement between Kernersville and Walkertown will expire in 2007. Kernersville officials have asked Walkertown to consider renewing the agreement, but no decision had been made.

Many Walkertown-area residents dealt with the possible loss of their investment savings through what government investigators called a Ponzi scheme involving the sale of mobile billboards.

Most residents had bought their plans from Scott Hollenbeck, an investment counselor who attended Gospel Light Baptist Church and sold a number of church members into the plan. The church had invested money with Hollenbeck into other investment plans.

In May, FBI agents seized records from Hollenbeck's office. The Securities and Exchange Commission filed a federal lawsuit against Hollenbeck and other sales agents.

Town officials became concerned in March when it was announced that a demolition-debris landfill was proposed for 382 acres north of town. The plans never materialized, and officials with the City-County Utilities Division later looked at another site on the border of Stokes and Forsyth counties.

A plan by a developer to put a mix of town houses and single-family houses on a tract north of Old Hollow Road caused a lot of debate during the year.

The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners in 2004 rejected an application from developer George Sowers to build on the site. Sowers approached town officials with a proposal to have the 69-acre site annexed into Walkertown, which would regulate the property.

The site is between Lakawanna Drive and Avalee Street.

Some neighbors opposed the project. They complained that the development would increase traffic on Old Hollow Road. Sowers said he considered extending the development to the north, and building a new road that would link Old Hollow Road with Sullivantown Road.

When the town's planning board considered the project in July, opponents packed the meeting room. Sowers defended his project as one that would have high quality.

He said that if he didn't put in a high-quality project, there were other developers ready to develop the land at lower standards.

The town council approved the Sowers project when it came up in late July. Sowers later offered to work with the town on providing sewer service to the town park on Wickenham Road.

Sheriff William Schatzman of Forsyth County asked Walkertown to pay for deputies, but the council didn't act on his request.

Schatzman proposed that four deputies and a detective be hired to provide law enforcement in Walkertown, which does not have its own police force. After a startup cost of \$485,500, the town would have paid about \$285,000 a year for the extra protection.

Council members called law enforcement a county responsibility and said they already pay taxes for that service. When the town put together its budget in the spring, the extra deputies were not included.

A plan to put apartments near the Walkertown Commons Shopping Center raised hackles when town officials discovered that they would be for people making less than the median-county income of about \$55,000 a year.

Officials with Glenwood Development Co., the builder of the shopping center, and MV Communities, the apartment developer, defended the project. They said that it would be good quality and that it would not detract from the town or the shopping center.

The town did not have much say about the project because it required no rezoning to proceed. That did not stop the council from opposing the project in July.

The developer met with a neighbor later in the year and changed some aspects of the plan to try to meet some objections. In November, the council approved the project's site plan.

Linville, the town manager of Walkertown since March 3, 2003, quit his job in May to take a position in Henderson County. The manager's position still had not been filled.

The Winn-Dixie store in Walkertown closed during the year, after the chain announced that it was pulling out of North Carolina and South Carolina. The management of Center Stage Shopping Center searched for another grocer to take its place, but the store remained empty at year's end.

Town spending on recreation made the news as fall approached. The town was given \$100,000 exclusively for recreation by the estate of Spencer C. Waggoner, and had an additional \$300,000 in a fund reserved for recreation and economic-development expenses.

Council Member Wallace Larrimore pushed for the town to spend more on recreation. The council formed a committee on spending the Waggoner bequest.

The Walkertown Area Plan was presented in the fall and got a modest reaction, but those residents who saw the plan said they were glad to see the town moving forward on planning. The council could consider the plan next year.

A change on the town council seemed certain when candidates filed to run for four seats. Larrimore and Dot Duggins, incumbent council members, both decided not to run.

Duggins later changed her mind and waged a write-in campaign. When the votes were counted Nov. 8, Wayne Hester and Brenda Mabe replaced Duggins and Larrimore on the council.

Horace Warner and Sarah Welch were re-elected. Mayor Doc Davis, who was unopposed, also was re-elected.

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