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Divided Marion commission denies NW development plan after longtime farm family objects

By [Joe Callahan](#) Ocala Star-Banner

Published 10:30 p.m. ET Apr. 20, 2021

A proposed 207-unit development off Northwest 60th Avenue was denied by the Marion County Commission on Tuesday after an hour-long debate about controlling sprawl in the county's designated urban growth area versus the need to protect farm land.

The commission voted 3-2 to deny development of the land, which is surrounded mostly by 450 acres known as Piney Woods Farm, owned by the family of retired Marion County Circuit Judge Hale Stancil, 75, who pleaded with officials to deny the development.

Commissioners Michelle Stone, who represents that area of the county, and Kathy Bryant voted for approval of the development, which was proposed to be built on the west edge of four-lane Northwest 60th Avenue, across from the Ocala Palms retirement community.

Northeast development: 320-home subdivision approved just north of Ocala

Southwest development: 392-home community coming along State Road 200

Southeast development: Huge development planned in Summerfield

Bryant said "I will hold my nose" and support the development if the developer agreed to build 5-foot-high berms, with fast-growing vegetation on top, to better protect the scenic farmland that surrounds that 60-acre development.

Commissioners Craig Curry, Carl Zalak and Chairman Jeff Gold voted to deny the development. Marion County staff recommended approval, with conditions. The planning and zoning board recommended denial a few weeks ago, but the application was revised before Tuesday's commission meeting.

A need for more comprehensive planning

Zalak said he wanted the commission to sit down and better plan the growth that is inevitable in that part of the county west of Ocala. He is concerned about all the potential developments being constructed without enough amenities.

"I just think we need some planning time," said Zalak, adding that if developments are approved without planning, then the county will end up footing the bill for more and more recreational venues that developers should be adding.

The proposed development included about one acre for pavilion-type structures, grills and playground equipment.

The land is zoned medium-density residential and is part of Marion County's platted urban growth boundary. It is not part of several thousand acres of protected agriculture land the commission designated as part of a streamlined land-use plan.

A good fit, since WEC is nearby

Stone noted that the new World Equestrian Center is nearby and open to the public.

"I mean, this is in my district," Stone said. "And I know there is no new housing, except what's being discussed, in that area. It's in the urban growth boundary and we have everything (water, sewage and other services) to support this type of development."

The proposed development would have been the first of its kind built in that general area: west of Northwest 60th Avenue, across the street from Ocala Palms. That area is known as Stancil's Corner.

The development would have been nestled south of U.S. 27, north of State Road 40 and between Northwest 80th and Northwest 60th avenues, where there is 5 square miles of mostly farmland that developers are itching to build on.

The World Equestrian Center and Golden Ocala are west of Northwest 80th Avenue. West of Northwest 60th Avenue and east of Northwest 80th Avenue is all rural land that's home to mostly cattle and horses.

Located just west of the Ocala city limits, this land has been in the hands of some families for a century.

Red light, green light: SR 200 corridor to get another traffic light

Highway to Ocala: 49th Ave. connector at least 3 years from completion

Yarr, mateys: Pirate bar slated for downtown

The entrance to the proposed development would be 3,000 feet south of U.S. 27. The property is owned by George Debenedicty and Adrian W Bell III, who spoke to the commission during the hearing on Tuesday.

A different kind of development for that part of town

Bell said he and Debenedicty acquired the property 18 months ago. He said the property is a 1.5 miles from Ocala Breeders' Sales Co. and the Ocala International Airport, and about 2 miles from the World Equestrian Center.

"This is a very different type of community," Bell said. "Golden Hills, which are older homes, all need to be redone. Ocala Palms is directly across the street. Again, those homes are from the '90s."

He said the only place a person can go to find a new home in that general area would be his new development.

As a lifelong Marion County resident, Commissioner Craig Curry said he could not vote for the development.

"I have seen this county chewed up and developed, paved over and ripped apart," he said. "As far as I am concerned, we (commissioners) are the last best hope. There are enclaves that make every sense in the world to develop."

Curry said it is not time to develop that that area of the county.

"I'm afraid if any development jumps over there ..., that it's going to fall and we're going to lose another one of those enclaves that make Marion County what it is," Curry noted. "People come here for the openness and the horse farms. We're in a period of time where everybody wants to scrape every piece of dirt to make a buck."

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