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Old-line family balks, but developer wants 207 homes in NW Marion near Ocala Palms

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Nestled south of U.S. 27, north of State Road 40 and between Northwest 80th and Northwest 60th avenues sits more than five square miles of mostly farmland that developers are itching to build on.

Located just west of the Ocala city limits, this land has been in the hands of some families for a century. Where landowners once grew tobacco, and now raise cattle, developers want to plant homes – and lots of them.

For those few people who live on several large parcels throughout those five square miles, the serenity is why they live there. It is the country life just a few miles west of rapidly growing Ocala.

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

So when Hale R. Stancil, who retired as a Marion County circuit court judge five years ago, learned of a planned 207-home development near his family's 450-acre Piney Woods Farm, he cringed.

Stancil, 75, has been spending most of his time on the family's homestead, which has been in his family since 1919. Stancil recently met with the Star-Banner at his property to talk about how Marion County growth is approaching his backyard.

"It was all wooded when I grew up here," said Stancil, who was born in 1946 at what was once known as Munroe Regional Medical Center. "A new development would change the whole dynamics of this community."

The proposed development, if approved by the Marion County Commission, would be the first of its kind built in that general area west of Northwest 60th Avenue, across the street from Ocala Palms Golf and Country Club community. That area is known as Stancil's Corner.

On a 3-2 vote, the Marion County Planning and Zoning Commission recently recommended denial of the proposed development. County government staff also had recommended denial. However, the fate of the development will ultimately be determined by the county commission.

If the commission decides to approve the plan, then the entrance to the development would be 3,000 feet south of U.S. 27. The property is owned by George Debenedicty and Adrian W Bell III.

'My mother came here in 1919'

Stancil, who was the only one to appear at a zoning board meeting to protest the planned subdivision, said the family farm abuts the north, south and west sides of the proposed development. The east side of the parcel fronts Northwest 60th Avenue.

"I have lived on this property all of my life," Stancil told the zoning board. "My mother came here in 1919 and she grew up on that property. We have a farm that we've been operating since 1919. This is right in the middle of it (farm) and would change the character of the neighborhood."

Though many people have told Stancil that a new development would only increase the value of his family's land, he said: "We have no intentions of developing it, selling it or anything like that."

"This would change the community," he said.

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

Most of the Stancil property stretches west of Northwest 60th Avenue all the way to Northwest 80th Avenue. In a five-square mile portion of land -- east to west between those avenues, and north to south between U.S. 27 to State Road 40 -- there are no large scale single-family developments.

Just east of Northwest 60th Avenue is Ocala Palms Golf and Country Club community and just west of Northwest 80th Avenue is the World Equestrian Center and Golden Ocala. Everything in-between is rural land that's home to mostly cattle.

Government planners voice concerns

Kim Dinkins, a senior planner with Marion County Growth Services, told the zoning board late last month that staff's recommendation for denial was based on a development plan that had a "few deficiencies and a couple that we're concerned about."

"The first one being that there was only one access point for a 207-unit development and our comprehensive plan requires two access points for these larger types of developments and that's a safety issue," Dinkins noted.

The second concern was that the developer did not have 25% open, or undeveloped space.

David Tillman, of Tillman and Associates Engineering LLC, said at the meeting that the plan is find another access point and said the community will meet the 25% open space requirement, if the buffers are included.

Tillman told the zoning board he was not aware the development was recommended for denial until that day.

Dinkins also noted at the hearing that the planned development property is "surrounded by medium-density residential" zoned property. That property moved to residential back in 2013 as part of changes to the county's future land use plan.

Stancil worries about the area dynamic

Stancil said he fears that the commission may approve the development if the property owners find a second access point. Stancil said he plans to attend the commission meeting when it is scheduled.

Though Stancil knows growth is inevitable, he does not want to see it in his lifetime.

"The property would touch the north, south and east portions of the property," he said Tuesday. "I'd rather see the open area, with trees and cows. It would change the dynamic of our (rural) community."

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