

## PITTSBORO

# Park proposal causes stir

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PITTSBORO — The proposed rezoning of 7,100 acres for Chatham Park — a mammoth business and residential park set to nestle between the town of Pittsboro and Jordan Lake — spurred passionate discussion Monday night ranging from cautious optimism to outright condemnation.

With more than 30 speakers and three hours of public

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# CHATHAM

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comment, residents urged the Pittsboro Board of Commissioners not to rush the project forward without proper environmental vetting and an understanding of how the park would mesh with the current composition of the town.

There has been a great outpouring from area residents with regard to this project, said Pittsboro Mayor Randy Voller, and town officials are listening.

"The most important thing this town has to discuss and come to grips with is this project we are going to be talking about tonight," he said. "This is pretty much going to formulate a template for where Pittsboro, Chatham County and the region will be going in the future."

This project, he said, requires examination and must be taken seriously.

"We have a group of people coming forth with a project that we need to look at and understand and figure out how this is going to integrate into the town and the county, and our future," Voller said.

## A Master Plan

Chatham Park Investors, a private development group that began purchasing rural land outside of Pittsboro in the mid-2000s, requested that the commissioners consider a "planned development district (PDD)" for the park in May of this year. If the commissioners approve the PDD, the project's developers — Cary-based Preston Development Company — would have greater freedom to "promote innovative land planning."

"In return for greater flexibility, planned developments in this district are expected to deliver communities of exceptional design, character and quality that preserve critical environmental resources and provide open space amenities," according to the Chatham Park application.

Chatham Park is portrayed as a "live-work-play site that will promote tech/bio-tech development," and Preston Development co-owner Tim Smith said the park will be showcased throughout the nation as a premiere example of environmentally sound development.

In a Preston promotional video, Chatham Park is touted as an alternative to the Research Triangle Park while still tapping the nearby universities for a talented workforce pool. The development may take anywhere from 15 to 30 years to construct, according to the video, but the park would have all the elements needed for a sustainable community. At full build out, the 106 parcels of land within the park would push Pittsboro's population to more than 60,000.

"It will be the premiere development in the United States for the next 30 years," Smith said. "It will be a showcase for this area, and a lot of people are interested."

## Culture Clash

With such a colossal project literally next door, many residents expressed worry that the development would erode and eclipse Pittsboro's small-town charm.

If there are not dedicated individuals evaluating and reviewing the park's proposal, local resident Miriam Pollard said she's worried Pittsboro's downtown may be etched out by big-box stores.

"I am not opposed to Chatham Park," Pollard said. "I am not opposed to growth. However, I want to know who is going to control the growth?"

Pierre Lauffer, a local planner, said the PDD offers great flexibility for the developers but takes away the control from the town.

"If you look at the master plan, as it is now, it wants to change the town of Pittsboro into its master plan instead of the other way around," Lauffer said. "The PDD is meant for the development to have consistency and to match the local character and historical heritage. Here is a case in which they want to change Pittsboro to look what they have in mind for the future."

No action concerning the proposed rezoning was taken Monday night, and it was the town's second public hearing. The commissioners will discuss the application during its Aug. 12 meeting when Preston makes its official presentation to the commissioners, according to Smith.

Several Preston staff members were present during the Monday night hearing, he said, and Preston will review all of the comments.

The application is available online at [www.pittsboronc.gov](http://www.pittsboronc.gov).

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