

# Liberty County Coastal Courier ONLINE

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## Hinesville keeps getting bigger

By: Patrick Donahue, Executive editor

The actions brought in more than 2,600 acres from the Independence project along West 15th Street and another 111 acres for a development off Topi Trail.

The team developing Independence, formerly known as Horse Creek, has held two information sessions with the city. City council also had a workshop last week with the Independence team that includes Lott and Barber architects, Thomas and Hutton engineers and Genesis homebuilders.

"That land is probably five or six times what it was worth prior to this action," developer Clay Sikes said. "This is going to be a major part of what happens at Fort Stewart."

Independence is 2,683 acres and developers plan to put 4,000 homes, ranging from single-family houses to townhomes to apartments. About half of the acreage is jurisdictional wetlands, according to Liberty Consolidated Planning Commission Director Sonny Timmerman. The developers plan to put those pieces of the parcel into a conservation easement.

Developers also sought and got planned unit development zoning. The consolidated planning commission recommended approval at its meeting Tuesday, with the stipulations that the developers comply with current city PUD zoning and any future rezoning within the next year and that all building and construction plans must be reviewed by the planning commission and city council.

"We could not have done the project without it," Sikes said of the PUD zoning. "The PUD was crucial to us because of the small concepts we envisioned."

Lott and Barber land planner Denise Grabowski said they intend to follow the PUD zoning guidelines and to continue to provide information in detail to city council.

"It will help you to appreciate the sense of scale," she said.

There are many engineering questions left to answer, developers admit.

"This is a journey of 1,000 miles," Mayor Tom Ratcliffe said. "We have taken the first step. We still have some heavy lifting to go."

Construction in Independence likely won't start for a few months, but developers want to have homes ready for the return of the Infantry Division from Iraq sometime in 2006.

The other large tract taken into the city was coupled with rezoning 158 acres from county A-1 to the city's R-1 and R-3, both single-family dwelling zonings.

"This neighborhood has been planned for a long time," said builder Claude Dryden, who made the zoning and annexation request. "We've been waiting until the time is right for a first-class neighborhood."

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Dryden said Cherokee Rose Country Club residents want bigger houses and others who moved away from there want to return.

"It's something there is a big demand for," he said.

Dryden said now that the annexation has been approved, design work will start immediately.

"We have worked on identifying the wetlands," he said. "These will be big lots with nice homes. We're looking forward to great neighborhoods the city really needs."

"This is something that's been waiting for 20 years," Noel Osteen, one of the partners in the land, said.

The 158 acres is split into two developments, one that will be a maximum of 60 single-family units and another with a maximum of 60 lots.

Both tracts also were rezoned for development. While the annexations went smoothly, residents along Topi Trail voiced concern over the expected increase in traffic.

"Topi right now is a dragstrip," Ron Anderson said. "Somebody's going to get killed. There is no doubt in my mind."

Timmerman said the planning commission's survey of the streets forecasts no significant burden from new traffic. In addition to restrictions on the number of lots, the planning commission also recommended the city look at traffic and rail safety. The property is adjacent to a rail line at its eastern edge.

"Though we have fairly narrow two-lane streets in Topi and Meloney, it should be able to work," Timmerman said.

But residents were still anxious over the extra number of vehicles. Scott Spencer asked the city to conduct a road safety audit. If the city's codes, in relation to road design, are outdated.

"I'm not anti-development. The city is growing. We need new neighborhoods," he said. "But not ones not designed with safe roads."

Topi does not have sidewalks or curbs and gutters. Ratcliffe, himself a Topi Trail resident, wondered if there was anything that could be done to improve Topi, even a one-time assessment on residents of the street for improvements.

Anderson also said the council should wait until council member Jack Shuman, who represents the area, could be at the meeting. Shuman was out of town Thursday.

"I know for a fact he has gotten his head bitten off over this," Anderson said.

The advertisement is a horizontal banner with a white background. On the left is the University of Phoenix Online logo, featuring a globe icon and the text "University of Phoenix ONLINE". In the center is a photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop. To the right of the photo is the text "Get ahead with an Organizational Leadership degree." in a blue serif font. Further right is the text "Earn it at University of Phoenix Online." in a blue sans-serif font. On the far right is a blue button with white text that says ">> Click".

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