

Final public hearing set for Chatham Park

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PITTSBORO The Chatham Park project and its city-size ambitions are scheduled for a final round of public thrashing and praise.

Preston Development Co. and the town of Pittsboro are nearly ready to put the developer's plan up for public comment on May 12, perhaps followed by a decision by the Board of Commissioners.

"Maybe after the public hearing, we can get a vote," said Tim Smith, lead developer of the proposal. "It's going on a year."

The Chatham Park master plan has been batted between town staff, its five elected commissioners and mayor, the development company and Lawrence Group, a planning firm Pittsboro hired to audit the project and look out for the town's interests.

Monday's meeting was crowded, as they have been during Chatham Park's consideration, but the crowd was subdued, and criticism of the project was couched with acknowledgments of its potential.

"You know, I'm feeling better about this," Mayor Bill Terry said

of the plan. "I think we may be saying the same thing in different words here."

The board talked about a few last requests it made of the developer.

First, Preston Development agreed it would illustrate its plans with examples of how neighborhoods, commercial centers and other ingredients of the development might look.

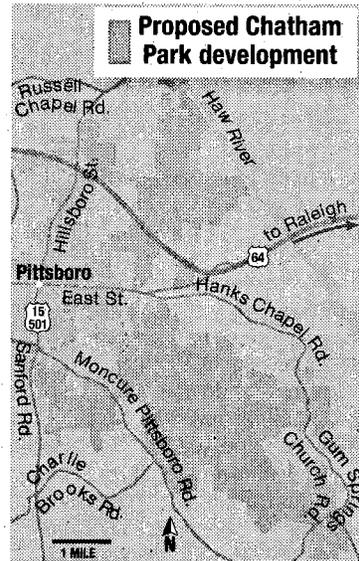
"If what we're approving is New York City on the Haw, we ought to at least understand that," Terry said. "Let's see that."

Standing outside the meeting, Smith said he can't predict 40 years of development style, but he would oblige.

Timing of open space

Following questions earlier this year about its land, Preston Development told the town that Chatham Park will include a minimum of about 2,000 acres of open space and parkland – about 28 percent of the total. Open space can include undeveloped woods.

Philip Culpepper, a representative of Preston, has said the company wants to set aside land as it builds each section of the commu-



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nity, rather than choosing and dedicating the land now.

"If houses get built, parks and open space get dedicated," Culpepper wrote in an email before the meeting. "If offices get built, open space gets dedicated. If nothing gets built, then the land just sits there undeveloped."

Pittsboro Matters, a group that has

pressed for changes in Chatham Park, wants to see the open space delineated and set aside early. Critics of the project also want to see more land kept in conservation, saying Chatham Park's hills and streams and its position above Jordan Lake and the Haw River could cause ecological problems.

With that in mind, town commissioners voted earlier to ask that land near the Haw River northeast of Pittsboro be "very lightly" developed. But Preston on Monday rejected the call for lowered density there, saying that "clustered," higher-density construction will be more efficient and may better protect the river and Jordan Lake just downstream.

The developers did agree to accept a previously written environmental report about the area, called the Southwest Shore Conservation Assessment, as a "reference to guide future development," according to town documents.

With those points in mind, Preston will push its plan toward a last few meetings.

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