

Country to city in 30 years

Developments will add 18,000 homes in rural Berkeley

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Berkeley County's newest city is on the rise, but there will be no mayor to elect or council to collect votes.

Cane Bay and The Parks of Berkeley are subdivisions that will add more than 18,000 homes in the next 30 years to the Sheep Island and New Hope areas.

"They are building a small city in the middle of a rural community that will change the character," said Al Parish, a Charleston Southern University economist. "The advantage of doing it as a planned community is that you can live your life there."

The developments will have land for parks, schools, churches, fire stations, libraries, industry and businesses such as dry cleaners, grocery stores and day-care centers. Those amenities will be mixed in with a network of roads and single-family homes, town houses and condominiums.

Planned for former timberland, the developments are separated by U.S. Highway 176 and bordered by Jedburg Road, Interstate 26 and U.S. Highway 17A.

"This will increase the amount of time families can spend together," said Cane Bay developer Ben M. Gramling III, president of Gramling Brothers, a Charleston-based real estate and development company.

Site work is starting at Cane Bay, with about 5,000 homes planned. Crescent Resources LLC of Charlotte, a real estate division of Duke Energy, bought the land for The Parks in March and hopes to break ground on it early next year. It will have about 13,000 homes.

The developments are designed to be walkable communities. Cane Bay has roughly 20 miles of walking and biking trails that will connect parks to schools and commercial areas, Gramling said. The Parks has a 25-mile trail system. Both will have parks, open space and ball fields.

The ability to design a plan to accommodate all the amenities is tied to the sheer size of the properties, developers said.

"We're planning today so that future fire stations, schools, businesses and homes are in the best locations for tomorrow," John Roach of Crescent Resources said in a statement.

The Parks is planned for more than 4,500 acres. Cane Bay is on 2,000 acres, although Gramling owns another adjoining

2,000 that could accommodate 5,000 more houses. He is drafting plans to develop the extension.

Both the developments have given on-site land to the Berkeley County School District; the district will have to pay school construction costs. Cane Bay has three school sites, and work has started at an unnamed \$61 million high school to relieve overcrowding at Stratford High School. The Parks has land for eight schools, including one site it will share with an adjoining property owner.

Together the developments will add a projected 9,202 students, 37,800 cars and roughly 40,000 more residents, Parish said. On the flip side, the residents of both are expected to generate about \$720 million in retail sales each year for an overall economic impact to the county of \$1.5 billion a year.

Not everyone is on the welcoming committee.

Carroll Cash, a New Hope resident, said he worries about the tax burden the developments will have on residents.

"They have done planning," said Cash, who is serving as a spokesman for the community. "But they haven't planned how we are going to get the schools paid for, the fire departments paid for. But it will allow these people to make their profits."

On behalf of concerned residents, Cash asked council Oct. 24 to form a task force made up of at least 16 members to study the impact of the subdivisions. He also asked council to consider adopting a so-called Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance, which would require developers to contribute to road improvements, infrastructure needs and the cost of building schools. Those ordinances are becoming popular in North Carolina in the greater Charlotte area.

To do all that, the residents wanted council to delay action on a rezoning request by The Parks, but council voted to move the request forward.

"If we stop the process we are in right now, we stop planning," County Supervisor Jim Rozier said.

Rozier said the county has worked diligently with the developers on planning. The county is considering an agreement with The Parks that would lock in requirements through 2036. Rozier said he is working with Gramling on a similar agreement.

Both properties are in a residential growth area in the council-

approved comprehensive plan, and development is subject to a lengthy approval process, Rozier said.

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance would not be necessary, Rozier said. Berkeley expects developers to provide land for schools, fire stations and parks among other public facilities, Rozier said. They have to pay to build all sewer and water lines needed for the subdivisions as well.

The county also is in the process of adopting impact fees that will charge developers for road improvements. The fees could be in place early next year but will be built into the agreements for The Parks and Cane Bay, regardless, he said.

"All of the homes going there, all of the businesses and all the industrial will pay taxes for all of the services," Rozier said.

For example, he said, services have been added to accommodate new residents living on the 4,000-acre Daniel Island while the county has reduced taxes.

Like Daniel Island, The Parks of Berkeley and Cane Bay will not have incorporated borders. But combined, the developments are projected to have more residents than Goose Creek or Moncks Corner.

And Parish doesn't doubt that, one day, the residents might make it official.

"It is certainly conceivable they may decide to create their own town," he said.

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Abstract (Document Summary)	

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