

**Town of Cary, North Carolina
Comprehensive Plan Amendment - Staff Report
14-CPA-04 – Ridgefield Farms
Town Council Meeting
September 11, 2014**

REQUEST

This is a Comprehensive Plan Amendment request for 95.64 +/- acres located on Ridgefield Drive between Green Level Church Road and NC 540, north of McCrimmon Parkway. The applicant proposes to change the land use designation from Medium Density Residential (MDR) to Low Density Residential (LDR).

NOTE: The purpose of a comprehensive plan amendment is to evaluate the appropriateness of a proposed land use and/or other issue, need, or opportunity for the subject parcel(s) of land. Technical design standards of the Land Development Ordinance are addressed during review of the site or subdivision plan and can be found at <http://www.amlegal.com/library/nc/cary.shtml>.

SUBJECT PARCELS

| Property Owner | Property Address | County Parcel Number (10-digit) | Real Estate ID | Deeded Acreage |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| James Lee Chao | 7424 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735081482 | 0127701 | 5.93 |
| James Lee Chao & Juliana M Ma | 0 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735076945 | 0127710 | 7.69 |
| Leo T & Nancy R Burka | 7420 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735084854 | 0127702 | 7.42 |
| Jimmie R & F Joan Suttle | 7416 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735087959 | 0127703 | 8.19 |
| Dennis M & Andrea L Lambert | 7410 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735191012 | 0127704 | 11.01 |
| 7408 Ridgefield LLC | 7408 Ridgefield Dr | 0735184707 | 0127705 | 8.11 |
| Christopher C & Wendy Lu K Cook | 7404 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735184325 | 0127706 | 6.71 |
| Robert Murray & Rosemary B Lucas | 7400 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735172800 | 0127707 | 5.97 |
| Robert J Trawick & Sabra J Faires | 7401 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735171155 | 0127708 | 5.76 |
| | 0 Green Level Church Rd | 0735072127 | 0127712 | 9.8 |
| | 0 Green Level Church Rd | 0735069895 | 0143447 | 4.0 |
| Donald P & Sherry T Knepper | 7405 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735078423 | 0127709 | 6.53 |
| VIBEBO LLS | 0 Ridgefield Dr. | 0735071789 | 0127711 | 8.52 |
| Total Area | | | | 95.64 |

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Applicant | Steven J. Vining Raleigh Land Fund I, LLC 516 N West Street Raleigh, NC 27603 |
| Agent | Adam Ashbaugh LStar Management, LLC 516 N West Street Raleigh, NC 27603 |
| Acreage | 95.64 ± |
| General Location | Ridgefield Drive between Green Level Church Road and NC 540, north of McCrimmon Parkway |

| Schedule | Town Council Public Hearing July 17, 2014 | Planning & Zoning Board Public Hearing August 18, 2014 | Town Council Action September 11, 2014 |
|--|---|---|---|
| Existing Land Use Plan designation | Medium Density Residential (MDR) with Map Note 6 on the Northwest Area Plan's Future Land Use Map | | |
| Proposed Land Use Plan designation | Low Density Residential (LDR) with an amended Map Note 6 on the Northwest Area Plan's Future Land Use Map | | |
| Existing Zoning District | Residential 40 (R-40); Watershed Protection Overlay District (Jordan Lake sub-area) | | |
| Town Limits | The subject property is located outside the corporate limits but inside the Town of Cary ETJ | | |
| Planning and Zoning Board Recommendation | Approval, 8 - 0 | | |
| Staff Contact | Meredith Chandler, Urban Designer/Senior Planner (919) 460-4983 meredith.chandler@townofcary.org | | |

SUMMARY OF PROCESS AND ACTIONS TO DATE

Notification of Town Council Public Hearing

Consistent with NC General Statutes, notice of the public hearing on the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment was mailed to property owners within 800 feet of the subject property, published on the Town's website, and posted on the subject property.

Town Council Public Hearing (July 17, 2014)

At the public hearing, staff presented the Comprehensive Plan Amendment request. Adam Ashbaugh of LStar Management, representative of 10 property owners in the Ridgefield subdivision, stated this request is based on direction from council and desire of the property owners for lower residential density and higher quality development. Two citizens spoke at the public hearing. Robert Trawick, who spoke on behalf of his wife and neighbor, voiced support for the comprehensive plan amendment request. He stated that low density residential will allow the development to retain natural areas. He also believed the plan will appeal to future residents and the neighboring low density residential areas. Betty Boda said she and her neighbors support amending the Land Use plan to low density residential. She agreed with Trawick's comments and believes LStar has listened to the neighbors and respected their needs.

Notification of Planning and Zoning Board Public Hearing

Consistent with NC General Statutes, notice of the public hearing on the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment was mailed to property owners within 800 feet of the subject property, published on the Town's website, and posted on the subject property.

Planning and Zoning Board Public Hearing (August 18, 2014)

At the public hearing, staff presented the case. Adam Ashbaugh of LStar Management, agent for the Ridgefield subdivision property owners, restated the property owners' interest in low density residential development. The board unanimously recommended approval of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment request.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SUMMARY

A. Northwest Area Plan

The Northwest Cary Area Plan is the governing land use document for the subject properties. The future land use designation for these properties is Medium Density Residential (MDR), which is defined as single-family attached or detached housing between three and eight units per acre. The applicant proposes to change the land use designation to Low Density Residential (LDR), which is defined as single-family housing at one to three units per acre, with lot sizes typically ranging from 10,000 square feet up to one acre. The plan document also notes that – for both the LDR and MDR land use categories

– that “a variety of neighborhood-compatible and complimentary institutional uses may also be considered such as churches, schools, and daycare facilities.”

The subject properties are also covered by Note #6 on the Northwest Area Plan’s Future Land Use Map. Note #6 states that:

“Ridgefield Farms lots should only convert from Very Low Density Residential (VLDR) to Medium Density Residential (MDR) uses when at least 3 or more adjacent lots are consolidated/assembled for that purpose.”

The applicant proposes to modify Note #6 to read as follows:

“Ridgefield Farms lots should only convert from Very Low Density Residential (VLDR) to Low Medium Density Residential (MDR) uses when at least 3 or more adjacent lots are consolidated/assembled for that purpose.”

Planning History

- 1996. At the time Cary’s townwide Land Use Plan was adopted in 1996, the Plan Map recommended that the subject area be developed as either Low or Medium Density Residential, or a combination of the two (“LDR/MDR”).
- 2002. The future land use recommendations were updated in September 2002, with adoption of the Northwest Area Plan. The Northwest Area Plan changed the future land use recommendations for the area to MDR with Map Note #6 (as cited above).

Comparison of Existing and Requested Land Use Plan Designations

The following table compares the number of dwellings that might be consistent with the current and proposed future land use recommendations. In either case, the maximum number that could actually occur would depend on the specific future zoning approved by Town Council.

| | Current Land Use Medium Density Residential (MDR) | Proposed Land Use Low Density Residential (LDR) |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Number of Dwellings | 287 – 765 units | 95 – 286 units |

Analysis: Either a low density or medium density residential product could be reasonable to develop on the subject properties. The following items should be noted when considering the merits of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment request for property within the Town’s Northwest Area Plan boundary:

Site Features. The Ridgefield Drive Neighborhood is completely surrounded by roadways on the east, south, and west, and by the Nancy Branch stream on the north. Besides separation from adjacent properties, this neighborhood includes steep slopes and stream buffers that will provide screening within any new development.

Housing Type and Density. The proposed land use designation, Low Density Residential (LDR), will limit the number of units as well as the type of housing that could be developed on this property to single-family detached residential. The current land use designation, Medium Density Residential (MDR), would allow single-family attached, semi-detached, and detached housing up to eight units per acre. While the current land use designation offers the possibility of a greater variety of housing units, and also presents the opportunity for an increased number of citizens to live adjacent to the Alston Regional Activity Center and within 1.5 miles of Research Triangle Park, the proposed amendment still provides an increase in housing beyond current conditions.

Transitions. The Northwest Area Plan was designed to increase residential density and development intensity towards the Alston Regional Activity Center and adjacent to Research Triangle Park. This transition is fully made from the southwestern edge of Cary all the way to Research Triangle Park. Medium density residential development was envisioned for the Ridgefield Drive Neighborhood to be consistent with this progression or transition.

B. Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources

According to the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Facilities Master Plan, a street-side trail is required along the eastern side of Green Level Church Road, and the Outer Loop Greenway is planned along the Western side of NC 540. In addition, the Ridgefield Farms neighborhood is bounded to the north by Nancy Branch, and the Nancy Branch greenway. The Nancy Branch open space corridor is one of four open space corridors planned as integral elements of the Northwest Area Plan. (See Northwest Plan, Chapter 1, Section 1.3 "Overview of the Plan: Open Space Corridors as the Central Element",

A recreation fund payment will be required for residential development in accordance with the Land Development Ordinance.

C. Growth Management Plan

The Growth Management Plan includes the following Guiding Principles that are relevant to this case:

- Guiding Principle A1: Increase permitted densities in preferred growth areas to encourage desired forms of development.
- Guiding Principle R1: Ensure that adequate infrastructure and services are available concurrently with new development.
- Guiding Principle L1: Concentrate growth near existing and planned employment centers and available and planned infrastructure to minimize costly service-area extensions.
- Guiding Principle L2: Ensure that future growth protects sensitive natural resources and protects open space.

Analysis or Comments: The Ridgefield Farms subdivision is located adjacent to the Alston Regional Mixed Use Center and is less than two miles from Research Triangle Park. While this request would increase the current density of development, it lowers the potential future residential density that is consistent with the Growth Management Plan. The Town of Cary Land Development Ordinance (LDO) requires infrastructure and services, as well as protection of natural resources.

D. Affordable Housing Plan

The Affordable Housing Plan includes the following goals that may be relevant to this case:

- Provide for a full range of housing choices for all income groups, families of various sizes, seniors, and persons with special challenges.
- Facilitate the creation of a reasonable proportion of the Town of Cary's housing as affordable units through additional homeownership opportunities for individuals and families earning between 60% and 80% of area median income and affordable apartments for individuals and families earning up to 60% of the area median income.

Comments: A single-family detached residential neighborhood may or may not support the goals of the Affordable Housing Plan, however in this instance support is unlikely.

E. Comprehensive Transportation Plan

Green Level Church Road is designated as a **Major Thoroughfare**

Existing Section: 2-lane road

Future Section: 6-lane road with landscaped median

Sidewalks: required on both sides of road

Bicycle Lanes: wide outside lanes required

Transit: future C-Tran route planned

Status of Planned Improvements: N/A

Transit Service: The nearest existing fixed-route transit service is provided by Triangle Transit Route No. 311 along NC 55 Highway, about one mile east of the site, by road, at the closest point. The future long-range service expansion plans for C-Tran envision a future route along Green Level Church Road, immediately fronting the site. However, the future timing and funding of such a service expansion has not yet been determined.

F. Open Space Plan

According to the Open Space Plan, the subject properties include multiple areas of mixed hardwoods and conifers, as well as several streams.

G. Historic Preservation Master Plan

This site has no identified historic resources.

APPLICANT'S JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT

Attached are the applicant's responses to the Comprehensive Plan Amendment justification questions contained in the application form. Please note that these statements are that of the applicant and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the Town of Cary.

CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERATION IN REVIEWING COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

Section 3.2.2(B) of the Land Development Ordinance states that proposals to amend the Comprehensive Plan shall be evaluated based upon whether the amendment is necessary in order to address conditions including, but not limited to, the following:

1. A change in projections or assumptions from those on which the Comprehensive Plan is based;
Analysis: The present future land use designation of MDR was applied to the subject properties with adoption of the 2002 Northwest Area Plan based on three factors: (a) that medium density provided a reasonable transition adjacent to the freeway and the Alston Regional Activity Center; (b) that higher densities were encouraged adjacent to the several east-west open space corridors and planned greenways that would provide direct connections to shopping, services, and employment in Research Triangle Park; and (c) that in order to make it financially feasible to assemble and redevelop the neighborhood, it was estimated that densities of 3-8 dwellings per acre would be required. The latter of those three considerations has evidently changed, as the housing market in the subject area has evolved since 2002. By virtue of the application itself, the market evidently can now support conversion of the neighborhood at LDR densities.
2. Identification of new issues, needs, or opportunities that are not adequately addressed in the Comprehensive Plan;
Analysis: No changes have been identified.
3. A change in the policies, objectives, principles, or standards governing the physical development of the Town or any other geographic areas addressed by the Comprehensive Plan; or
Analysis: No changes have been identified.
4. Identification of errors or omissions in the Comprehensive Plan.
Analysis: No changes have been identified.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

This Comprehensive Plan Amendment is a request to change the future land use designation of the Ridgefield Farms Neighborhood from Medium Density Residential (MDR) to Low Density Residential (LDR). Staff believes either a low density or medium density residential product could be reasonable to develop on the subject properties.

As per the LDO criteria for consideration in reviewing Comprehensive Plan Amendments (listed in the report section immediately above), the first item is met—a change in projections or assumptions on which the Comprehensive Plan is based. It was assumed in the early 2000's that in order to make it financially feasible to assemble and redevelop the Ridgefield neighborhood, that density of 3 – 8 units per acre would be needed. By virtue of this application itself, the market evidently can now support redevelopment of the Ridgefield neighborhood at lower density residential, or 1 – 3 units per acre.

In addition to the criteria for consideration for determining whether or not a Comprehensive Plan Amendment is necessary, the following items should be considered:

- Natural site features that create separation of this neighborhood;
- Decrease in number of housing types allowed and decrease in density adjacent to the Alston Regional Activity Center and near Research Triangle Park;
- Land use transitions through Northwest Cary towards Research Triangle Park;
- And a decrease in consistency with the Growth Management Plan.

The natural site features found on the subject properties may prove easier to work with, as an opportunity instead of a constraint, at lower density residential development. The remaining three points listed above would be better supported by a medium density residential product.

Although this case may not bring the ideal residential density to support the goals of the Town's Northwest Area Plan and the Growth Management Plan, it will increase the residential density compared to what currently exists. On balance, staff recommends approval of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment request.