

Developer unveils his mega-plan

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BEAUFORT - On June 3 the board of commissioners approved a pre-annexation agreement between the town, Blue Treasure LLC and Front Street Village LLC.

The agreement increases the size of Beaufort tremendously, which is cause for change and expansion to the town's new wastewater treatment plant, but the bill is being footed entirely by Preston Development and Front Street Village.

The changes that need to be made will not affect the construction timeline of the plant.

And on Friday, June 18, both LLC's, which have large developments planned for the east end of downtown Beaufort, filed their individual requests for annexation.

Preston Development, developers and partners in Blue Treasure LLC had not submitted any preliminary plans to the town at presstime, but they were permitted by the state in the spring for their own waste-water treatment plant, which has now been scrapped, and are planning a residential development with more than 2,800 bedrooms.

But Charles "Bucky" Oliver, 66, owner of Front Street Village, has submitted his plans, in full color, to the town for review.

Mr. Oliver and his wife have had a home on Front Street for about seven years, but are part-time residents and split their time between Beaufort and Chapel Hill where he has lived for 47 years.

He and his wife have been working on ideas for Front Street Village for five years but the total life of the project could be from seven to 15 years and cost up to \$350 million.

The project's timeline looks like phase one, which includes dry stack construction on the 8.17-acre parcel, formerly part of Beaufort Fisheries, will begin in the fall.

Permitting and demolition will also be done in the third quarter of this year. Construction and the other phases of the project will probably not begin until 2010.

The infrastructure of Front Street Village includes roads, golf cart, bike and pedestrian paths, power, telephone, cable, water and sewer, irrigation, docks, sound, lighting and landscaping.

On-site amenities include a swimming pool, private club, restaurant and meeting rooms.

Off-site amenities include water and sewer, access to an Olympic pool, kayak club, tennis, golf, fishing and boat charters.

The owners' goals, as stated in their packet, are "to remain within our expertise and financial capabilities, to complement and be true to Beaufort's charm and history, to be manageable, to be fun, to be significantly financially successful and to discourage vehicle use on Front Street."

The automobile access to the development and its hotel will be on Lennoxville Road, which Mr. Oliver said is more direct and safer.

The ultimate plan includes up to 350 residential units, built in phases, with "a substantial percentage operated by a recognized premium hotel proprietor."

There are 22 600-square-foot units, 57 1,000-square-foot units, 21 1,100-square foot units, 102 1,600-square foot units and 11 single-family lots.

Membership in a club with a four-star restaurant and bar facilities would be included in the unit offerings, as well as optional boat slip and dry stack facilities.

The dry stack boat storage, a permitted use in I-W (industrial warehouse) zones, will be the first thing built. The dry-stack unit will be constructed across from the Curtis Perry Park at the end of Front Street.

There is grass being planted in that area right now because Front Street Village is the host for the Beaufort Offshore Celebrity Classic.

The restaurant, an exciting project for Mr. Oliver, is planned to be located where the raw house still stands on the dockside on Taylor's Creek. The old lifts and belts will be taken off so the building can be torn down and rebuilt to become a bistro-type restaurant, but all the fixtures will be added after construction to give it back its historical context as an integral part of the Beaufort Fisheries.

"We're very respectful of the heritage of this facility," said Mr. Oliver. "We're sorry to tear it down because we look at it as a historical facility, but we didn't shut it down. We're the next generation of what needs to happen here."

Mr. Oliver said he and his right-hand-man Jay Peregoy, who has been in Beaufort since 1966, have been amazed at the things they've seen while dis-mantling the plant.

"We've been mesmerized by the intricacy of the mechanics," Mr. Oliver said. "It's absolutely unbelievable."

Mr. Oliver said he plans on keeping many of the larger historic pieces of the plant including large gears, hydraulic pumps and the net reel and the pieces will be highlighted throughout the future development.

Mr. Oliver said his development, as well as Blue Treasure's, will truly be assets to the town by adding to the old Beaufort feel and increasing and encouraging pedestrian and bike traffic.

He added that once built, if annexed, the developments will greatly increase the town's annual revenue.

Vehicle transportation within the project will be limited to electric golf carts, which will be available at the transportation center together with automobile parking, rental cars and town car service.

There will even be a tunnel running under Lennoxville Road to ensure pedestrian and bike safety from one part of the Village to the other.

Phase one of the project includes construction of the dry bay and a portion of dockside with 234 dry bay boat units, deepwater slips and staging.

Phase two includes the residential units, club, restaurant and bar facilities

Phase three of the development includes a portion of development on Lennoxville Road and phase four includes the remainder of development north of Lennoxville Road.

The planned hotel/inn is a 78-room facility with 74 standard rooms, four suites, a banquet hall, several boardrooms and a pool.

The design of the hotel incorporates the open feel of many Beaufort homes with large porches all around.

"We're trying to get that Beaufort feel, that charm," Mr. Oliver said.

And depending on the homeowners of the development, those who are only part-timers will have the option of having the owner/operator of the hotel coordinating their home rentals, as well.

Dan Sears of Sears Design has been hired to prepare the conceptual design, Bill Forman of Coastal Science and Engineering has been selected for engineering data collection, design and permitting, and Historical Concepts out of Atlanta, Ga., have been hired for the architectural design of the development.

Blue Treasure LLC has also hired Historical Concepts for its architectural design.

Sketches and photographs included in the packet given to the town show a large development with a "quaint" feel created by narrow cobblestone streets, tall, Charleston-style buildings (minus the French frills), iron-gated gardens and of course, sidewalks.

The clubhouse drawn is quite large with porches all around, similar to the homes and neighborhoods.

“My wife has taken on the conversation piece that this is kind of the eastern bookend of the charm of Beaufort,” Mr. Oliver said about his future development.

He said his streetscape is intended to develop a livable, inviting, largely pedestrian neighborhood similar to the rest of Beaufort.

Mr. Oliver said he hopes to appear before the planning board in July along with Blue Treasure LLC, but the scheduling has been left up to the town.

“Whatever they ask, I’ll do,” Mr. Oliver said.

Perhaps one of the best things about Front Street Village is that Mr. Oliver is hoping to make it a natural extension of Front Street by having the waterfront walkway extend into the Village all the way past the raw house.

“It will not be a gated community,” Mr. Oliver said.

And the plans, he said, though drawn up, are by no means final.

“This is an organic document,’ he said. “It’s a vision that’s growing every day and hopefully in time we’ll get it to what draws the support of the community.”

History of the land

Front Street Village is made up of several parcels of land including the Loftin parcel of 5.18 acres at 2361 Lennoxville Road, owned by the Loftin family, acquired in 2006.

The packet submitted to the town said that particular parcel has been thoroughly remediated to residential standards, stored, fenced and is being used as an outdoor boat storage facility. A well has been drilled and pump installed for boat wash downs.

Front Street Village also includes the old Beaufort Fisheries, a 24.99-acre parcel acquired in August 2007.

The Beaufort Fisheries property is east of the Lofton property and is comprised of a 16.82-acre tract on the north side of Lennoxville Road and an 8.17-acre tract on the south side of Lennoxville Road bordered by the waterfront on Taylors Creek.

This property aligns with the property owned by Blue Treasure LLC on Chadwick Road.

Beaufort Fisheries Inc. ceased processing menhaden in January 2005 after 75 years of operations.

The Wheatly and Potter family previously owned the corporation, but after three and a half years of negotiations, Mr. Oliver acquired all of the shares of the corporation on Aug. 21, 2007.

The packet given to the town said, "Due diligence including a current phase two environmental report, survey, title, policy, appraisal, financial and legal review were accomplished."

Those parcels, which make up Front Street Village, are bordered to the east by Atlantic Veneer. The packet states in December 2007, land was swapped with Atlantic Veneer and that the company's owners have expressed an interest in converting some of their warehouse space to dry stack storage.

Mr. Oliver explained the land was exchanged to Atlantic Veneer so they would not be landlocked by Front Street Village and Blue Treasure property and so the two developments could meet at Chadwick Street.

Mr. Oliver said the dry stack boat storage facility will hopefully be completed by next spring, but that because of permits required by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management and the U.S. Corps of Engineers, it could be 2010 before the rest of the development gets under way.

But that doesn't bother Mr. Oliver because he said he's different than other developers.

"By nature, this is a long-term, patient, higher-end development to be done over time," he said. "I'd love to sit here 10-12 years from now with things still being done.

"I'm a long-term planner in all of my business. I'm impatient and I like things to get done, but I want it to be done over time."

And so far, with the help of Mr. Peregoy's leadership 900 tons of steel and 1,000 tons of debris have already been removed from the site to get the project started.

"I think it's right for the town," Mr. Oliver said. "The intent is not to change the charm of Beaufort, if anything, we just want to be a part of the seascape of Beaufort. There's no place like it."

And in case anyone was wondering, Mr. Oliver said he plans to be good to the town in regard to height regulations. In the extraterritorial jurisdiction where the old fisheries lie, the height limit is 40 feet.

Mr. Oliver said he plans on the dry stack, hotel and raw house restaurant being 40 feet. Everything else will not exceed the 35-foot height limit of the town.

"We're really trying to be good neighbors, and I mean that day in and day out," he said.

He added that this project, through construction and completion will bring more jobs to Beaufort than did the fisheries during its hay day.

Mr. Oliver said the plans will all be available online eventually at www.frontstreetvillage.com.