

Greenhurst residents, developer face off over Bailey Drive access

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May 16, 2017



file/Jenna-Ley Harrison/Journal Scene

This location on Bailey Drive in Dorchester County's Greenhurst subdivision could soon become a connector road for emergency vehicles only to access between Greenhurst and Carrington Chase, a new residential development in the town limits.

How to properly secure a gate along a connector road between a Dorchester County neighborhood and a new residential development in Summerville town limits sparked an emotional debate May 15 during a Planning, Development and Building Committee meeting, just prior to County Council's meeting.

Committee member and councilman David Chinnis said he didn't feel comfortable voting in favor of a request, as currently written, allowing Bailey Drive—in the Greenhurst subdivision—to be utilized as a connector road to the new Carrington Chase development. At least 160 housing units are planned for the area, which lies almost equally in Dorchester and Charleston counties.

The councilman agreed with two Greenhurst residents who spoke during a public hearing on the matter, stating they wanted county officials to promise no vehicles other than emergency vehicles be allowed to access Bailey Drive from the intersection of Bailey Drive and Greenhurst Avenue.

"I have a challenge with the dearth of details," Chinnis told Carrington Chase developer Stan Walker, also present at the meeting.

In January residents spoke to council and were opposed to even opening up the road between the two subdivisions. Now, they simply hope the county will stick to its new plan—allowing only fire, EMS and law enforcement vehicles—to access the connection.

"I want to see that council really has the definition of emergency vehicles so the traffic does not increase through that gate just because it's there," said Greenhurst resident John Nichols.

Along with Chinnis, they also want a secure gate with an unbreakable lock.

"I see a plan for an iron pipe with a padlock," Chinnis said. "If you've got a different gate in mind I'd like to know that."

In the event someone cuts the lock with a padlock cutter, Chinnis wanted to know what happens next.

"That gate is slung open, and how quickly does that gate get closed?" he asked.

Nichols echoed the councilman's thoughts.

"If they are going to get their connection, we want a gate that is secure (and) isn't able to be tampered with (by) every Tom, Dick and Harry who wants to run his 4-runner through there," he said.

As head of the Greenhurst crime watch, Nichols is cautious of criminal activity.

"It's going to become a shortcut for people who don't necessarily obey certain laws," he said.

Though initially adamantly opposed to even opening a connection road between neighborhoods, Nichols said he felt his and fellow concerned neighbors' thoughts carried little weight in the matter.

"It's obvious what several of us had to say...went in one ear and out the other," Nichols said. "Money talks; Carrington Chase is going to get what they want."

But Walker denied that allegation. He stated quite the opposite and for most of his passionate speech at the podium he faced the meeting crowd, talking directly to residents.

"I am not a rich developer. I am a broke developer after going through the recession," he said.

Walker appeared to empathize with Greenhurst residents and assured them he would do his best to have a secure gate erected.

"The town of Summerville has declared that we have access to Bailey Drive," Walker said. "I can assure you we will put a gate up that will be maintained...will put up something that will meet and satisfy the commission and satisfy you guys...so this won't be a traffic spot."

Walker described some sort of electronic padlock device for the gate—a device not described in the plan that committee members reviewed, Chinnis said.

When Chinnis suggested tabling the committee's vote until the developer could provide more detailed plans, Walker told the board he needed an immediate decision from them, to move the process along and keep him from losing money—especially after he explained he had shown up at two past council meetings only for the item to not be discussed.

"I'm concerned because every day I'm just sitting here idle," Walker said. "It's costing me a lot of money."

The state previously maintained Bailey Drive, but earlier this year council voted to have the county take over the road's maintenance. After three decades untouched, the road was finally repaved.

Residents still fear the connector access will result in heavy traffic volumes—maintenance trucks and other non-emergency vehicles using it—and safety risks for children playing in and around the street. "We have too many heavy vehicles on the road already. It's not what we need," said Greenhurst resident Troy Hodge. "I've been against this since I heard about it, and I don't think it should go through."

Nichols agreed the traffic count is high.

"Our traffic situation is horrendous," he said. "I sit on my front porch and I see...100 cars a day...coming directly off of Bailey."

After much discussion, committee members reached a decision and voted in favor of the request made by developers—with a recommendation for council.

The committee recommended the developer submit to council a "secure" and "tamper resistant" gate design plan approved by county Public Works Director Jason Carragher.

"All I ask is for consideration for residents outside the town of Summerville," Chinnis said.