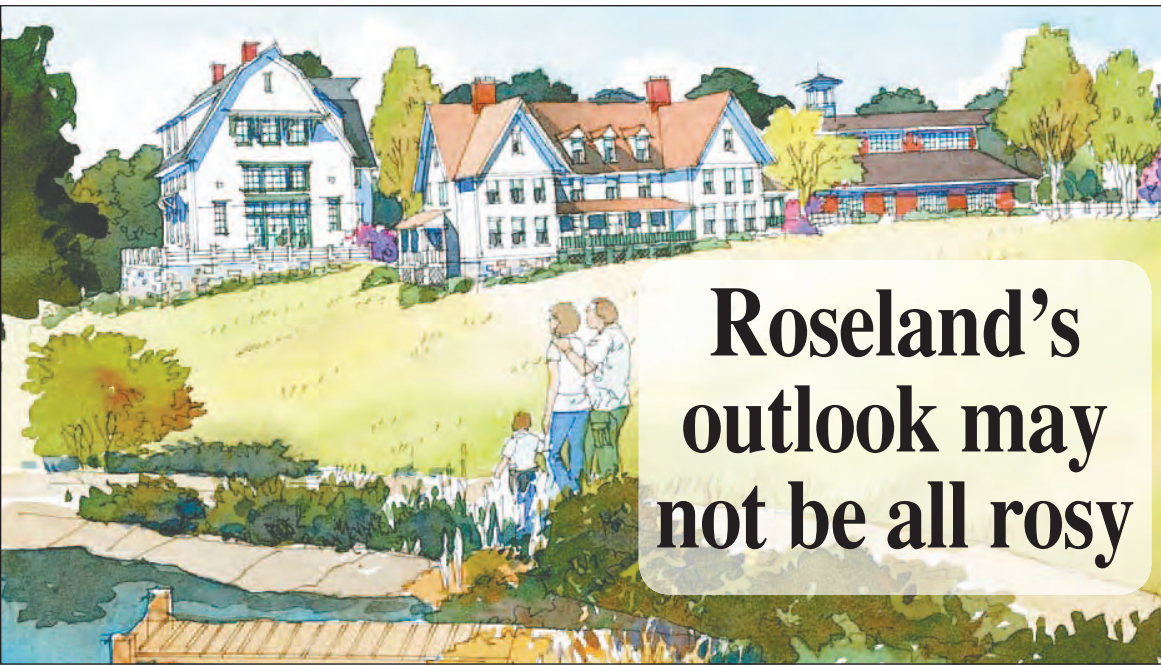


# Chesterfield Observer

Volume 13, Number 36 Your Community Newspaper Since 1995 • Chesterfield County, Virginia • ChesterfieldObserver.com September 19, 2007



## Roseland's outlook may not be all rosy

Roseland Development Co.

The above watercolor rendering is what Roseland, a 1,395-acre mixed-use development at the intersection of Route 288 and Woolridge Road, might look like. As proposed, Roseland would create a mini-city with 5,140 homes and 1.5 million square feet of retail and office space at build-out.

By Greg Pearson  
STAFF WRITER

The largest planned community ever proposed in Chesterfield County may be in jeopardy because it won't meet tough new phosphorus runoff standards now being recommended by the county's planning department.  
"The .16 standard destroys

Roseland," said Dave Anderson, a partner with the Roseland Development Company (RDC). "We can't meet it in our commercial area, and it's difficult in our residential area." He said RDC has written the supervisors notifying them the water standard cannot be met.  
The county's proposed amendments now before the Chesterfield Board of Supervisors would set

a standard of "no net increase in phosphorous runoff" from undeveloped land, and all new development would be required not to exceed .16 pounds of phosphorous runoff per acre annually – the amount of phosphorous that is estimated to be generated from undeveloped land. The planning commission  
see ROSELAND, page 25



VS.

Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Don Sowder (left) and Dan Gecker, candidates for Midlothian District supervisor, discussed taxes, economic development, residential growth and other topics during a recent debate hosted by the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce.

## Midlothian supervisor candidates square off

By Greg Pearson  
STAFF WRITER

The candidates for supervisor in Midlothian District – incumbent Republican Don Sowder and Independent Dan Gecker – took different positions on a number of issues last Thursday in a debate hosted by the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce. Here are the candidates' edited responses to the questions:

to escalate, homeowners and commercial property owners are paying ever higher property taxes. What would you do about the property tax rate?  
**Gecker:** The amount of property taxes borne by residents is excessive. We should increase our economic development efforts and spend our money more wisely. The county is spending \$20 million for road development in the western part of

Because property values continue

see DEBATE, page 6

## Putting down roots Newcomers try to make their way in Chesterfield

By Susan Nienow  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Nobody has ever written a book named "Moving Can Be Fun." Maybe it's the endless boxes, the painful goodbyes or the daunting task of starting over.  
Anyone who has ever relocated knows the challenges of moving to a new place – navigating unknown streets, making friends, helping children settle into school, meeting

the neighbors. There's often very little that resembles the life that was left behind.  
But it may help those new to the area to know they are not alone. There are thousands of people who begin calling Chesterfield County "home" each year. These are some of their stories:  
**Newcomer's group**  
A veteran of 12 moves, Sue Shirley has found her latest one harder than any other. Her husband has

retired, and they moved to Chesterfield to be near their daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren.  
Because her husband is a minister, all previous moves have taken them to a new church where members welcomed them. Now her husband is filling in at different churches, and Shirley has to make her own way. It has been a year, and she hasn't found her niche yet.  
see NEWCOMERS, page 12



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Debbie Sledz still has a few boxes to unpack after moving to Midlothian from Long Island, N.Y., four months ago.

this district. We subsidize commercial development and, using proffers, place the entire capital costs on residential development. We need to shift some of the costs of growth from residential to retail, which follows residential rooftops. According to sales costs of commercial properties printed in the Observer, those assessments have not kept pace with fair market value.

**Sowder:** Our taxes are too high, and this past year's assessment climbed about 16 percent. The board of supervisors has nothing to do with assessments, which are prescribed by state law at their full market value. The board has the responsibility for adjusting the property tax rate. This year we reduced the property tax rate from \$1.04 to 97 cents – not enough. We need to increase our commercial base. In the tax rate discussions by the board earlier this year, I proposed the 97 cent rate as a compromise.

*The county budget is growing at 2-3 times the rate of population growth and inflation. Do you support continuing this trend?*

**Gecker:** No. We've had assessment increases in the last three years of about 40 percent and only cut the tax rate 7 percent. Where is that additional money going? If the board gave the budget only a 5 percent increase per year since 2004, the property tax rate would be 78 cents – which I am not advocating. That's a 19 cent difference, and I doubt the citizens receiving county services can account for that 19 cents. Property taxes have increased five times the amount we've cut the rate. We need to control our spending and not rely on asking the staff.

**Sowder:** I do not, and the board has ordered a full and complete outside audit of our operations. With the change in administrations, this is timely. Spending beyond core government functions – education, roads and public safety



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

**About 150 people attended** a debate between Midlothian supervisor candidates Don Sowder and Dan Gecker held at the Holiday Inn Koger Center last week.

– is discretionary. Our audit will look at in what areas we can reduce spending. There's some fat in Chesterfield County. We've got to find out where it is, but I don't know where it is. We need more public input in the budget process, focusing on a zero budget concept. We need to have our county departments justify their budgets.

*Many people in the business community are concerned that reducing residential growth in the county will negatively impact economic growth. What is your view?*

**Gecker:** I'm not sure that residential growth reduction would necessarily lead to a reduction in commercial growth. The county is over-retailed today. The westward residential growth on Midlothian Turnpike has not helped business growth on eastern Midlothian. The county needs to be more aggressive about economic development. We have not paid enough attention to small- and medium-size businesses, allowing them to grow. The county has gone after very big players, but small and medium businesses are the backbone of business growth.

**Sowder:** The ideal is to have a 70/30 split with 30 percent of our property taxes coming from commercial development. Henrico County has that. We're making progress with projects like the Watkins Centre – probably the most exciting thing in Chesterfield in our lifetime. It's a complex of retail, office and industrial. It will have a residential component, and in the future we need a mix of development – living, working without getting out on our roads to commute to work. Three out of 10 workers now commute across the river.

*The county's stated policy is that "growth should pay for itself." What is your view?*

**Gecker:** It's the county policy, but it's one that needs discipline. We instituted that system in 1991 with the proffer system. Our transportation department estimates we are \$1 billion behind in our road needs. Growth doesn't pay for roads in the county. The board has released developers of their transportation requirements, creating a deferred liability. In a good year the state would give Chesterfield \$20 million. In 10 years, that's \$200 million – only 20 percent of the county's shortfall. The concept requires the board to enforce growth paying for growth.

**Sowder:** It's an ideal policy that we try to adhere to. Commercial growth absolutely pays for itself, particularly where developers use a commercial development authority and pay a higher tax rate for their roads. CDAs are a funding mechanism. Residential normally does not pay for itself. We have to focus on mixed development communities called Neo

Urbanism. Most rezonings coming before the board are now using the "old town" concept where residents can work and live without having to go outside the community.

*With the state stepping away from its traditional road building role, how should the county raise money to build roads?*

**Gecker:** The commonwealth has the responsibility for building roads. Our legislative delegation should be doing its job to find the answer. First, we should survey our roads, then prioritize them and price it up. The county should prioritize roads with other services. The Transportation Summit identified \$340 million in funding sources, but that's not enough to solve the problem. The board didn't allocate one penny of the property tax rate for roads or deal with BPOL.

**Sowder:** We shouldn't back away from the state's responsibility. Today, it costs \$8 million to build one mile of two-lane road, which is the amount the state gives us every year. The board has looked at a number of options including CDAs, BPOL, one penny from the real estate tax rate, and bond issues. We deferred a decision because the state was revisiting it, so we'll be revisiting the transportation funding issue very shortly.

*The county has two GRTC express bus routes and limited regular bus service. Should bus service in Chesterfield be extended?*

**Gecker:** We need more analysis, and the county's analysis in the past has been limited to: will it cost us money in the form of a subsidy? I think that's too simplistic. I support the goal of more mass transit and communities that don't require so much automobile use. I served on Governor Warner's taskforce on urban transit and imposed a requirement on the Watkins Centre for light rail, which the commission approved unanimously, but was eliminated by the board.

**Sowder:** I would have a hard time answering that question because I am not familiar with the need. I'm not up-to-date, but we are supplying funding to GRTC. I'm aware of some citizen requests for GRTC, but we need to go beyond that. We have locations for railroad stations in Midlothian. We need to support public transportation including GRTC, but I want the system to support itself in time. We cannot support your tax dollars going into what should be private enterprise.

*Many of our schools are over their capacities and are using temporary classrooms to teach our children. Are those children in temporary classrooms receiving less of an education than those students being taught in permanent buildings?*

**Gecker:** I have faith in our teachers to

## Debate scheduled for Dale/Clover Hill candidates

Candidates for supervisor in Dale District and Clover Hill District will debate each other at the county chamber's October meeting. The luncheon meeting will be held at the Cultural Center of India, 6641 Ironbridge Pkwy., from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. on Oct. 11. The cost of the luncheon is \$10, and reservations are required. Call 748-6364.

teach anywhere. But over time, the education experience, including socialization, is diminished by the number of trailers. Trailers are increasing in numbers because we are not planning well for the increasing number of students. Unlike most of the state, the number of students will increase here. The \$55 million for the new Clover Hill High School didn't increase our student capacity. That was a mistake. Long-term, the county shouldn't be educating students in trailers.

**Sowder:** Chesterfield schools, even with trailers, are a model for the region and the state. Two high schools in this district are among the top 3 percent in the country. None of us like trailers, but even if we doubled the property tax rate, we'd still have trailers. It's a fact of life. Those students being taught in trailers are not being deprived. The number of students compared to the county's total population is decreasing.

*Chesterfield has already invested \$9.2 million in buying Cloverleaf Mall with yet more to be spent on buying the land under the mall. Should the county be in the land development business?*

**Gecker:** We shouldn't be in the land development business, but I pushed for it. Several years before the mall was for sale, I recommended we buy the Sears building that was for sale because we could control the development by owning the Sears building. The ownership of Cloverleaf Mall is so complicated, it required the county's intervention. Buying the mall against future tax revenues, it is a good investment. But we haven't done a good job of site management there.

**Sowder:** This decision was made prior to my coming on the board, but I support it. Cloverleaf Mall was a crown jewel, but it has fallen into decay. It's a gateway to eastern Chesterfield, and there are consequences to doing nothing. The residents and business community have been positive to the county's intervention. In this case, the county needed to be involved. It's good for the county's economic development and for the impression you get when entering Chesterfield.

*To foster regional cooperation, there is already a 2 percent local tax for those renting hotel rooms in the county that goes to support the Richmond Convention Center. Do you support this tax?*

**Gecker:** The question is cost and benefit. I don't have the statistics to determine whether the county has benefited. Chesterfield hasn't done a good job in being a regional player, not stepping up to our full share in the region. Outside businesses are being steered away from Chesterfield. It's time for the board and the administration to recognize our role in the region and participate more fully.

**Sowder:** We cannot isolate ourselves from the region. I serve on the convention center board, the Richmond regional planning commission and the Maymont Foundation. There are lots of cooperative efforts but not enough. Sometimes I think we are shortchanged, and we have to work on those. But the conventions bureau has been involved with Henricus, which is here in Chesterfield. I'm opposed to raising taxes, but I support this one because we benefit from the hotel stays and the restaurant visits.

## OFFICIAL NOTICE

**A General Election will be held on Tuesday, November 6, 2007.**

**The polls will be open from 6AM to 7PM.**

**Final day to register to vote for this election is Tuesday, October 9, 2007.**

**Absentee voting begins on Monday, September 24, 2007.**

**The final day to vote in-person by absentee ballot is Saturday, November 3, 2007.**

The Registrar's Office, 9848 Lori Road, will be open for absentee voting from 8:30 AM to 5 PM, Monday - Friday, and 9 AM to 5 PM, Saturday, October 27, 2007 and Saturday, November 3, 2007.

**Call 748-1471 for directions.**