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New homeowners' group asks supervisor candidates to take pledge on county's future



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

County resident Rick Brindle (left) has joined with the presidents/board members of 15 homeowners' associations, including Ryland Reamy (center) and Dick Guthrie, both from Brandermill, to form the Chesterfield Coalition of Homeowners Association Presidents. The group is asking all supervisor candidates to sign a pledge committing to change how the county does business.

By Greg Pearson
 STAFF WRITER

The presidents of 15 homeowners' associations are asking board of supervisors candidates to sign a pledge that, if elected, they will favor overhauling the way Chesterfield County conducts business - particularly when it comes to residential and commercial development. The three-page written pledge has 23 yes or no commitments for each candidate to approve or disapprove.

After the November election, the Chesterfield Coalition of Homeowners Association Presidents (CCHOAP) says it will establish criteria "to monitor compliance to their pledge." To see the citizen contract, go to www.chesterfieldobserver.com and click on "Special."

The preamble to the pledge says the candidate would agree to "significantly modify the county's current policies, practices and ordinances for managing residential and commercial growth...[to restore] the lost confidence of Chesterfield's citizens...in the county's leadership." The "major reforms" include "a moratorium on all new residential development pending a comprehensive assessment of the county services and infrastructure including schools, transportation," the environment and public safety.

The Contract with the Citizens of Chesterfield also calls for "a multifunctional committee" of expert planners and community leaders "to modify the county's comprehensive plan."

The pledge includes three separate provisions which would defer or deny rezoning unless necessary roads, classrooms and recreation are available at build-out of residential developments. It also calls for eliminating "all classroom trailers within five years" and requiring developers to pay into an enforcement fund for 3-5 years after construction to make sure proffers and building codes are met.

CCHOAP also wants an "independent consulting firm" hired to audit the "county's governance and management processes to ensure efficiency" and reduce possible waste of taxpayer funds. Additionally, it asks candidates to support expanding the board from

five to seven members.

"The contract is voluntary, but we'll be asking all the candidates to commit to the provisions they support," said Rick Brindle, CCHOAP's founder. The contract will be mailed to the candidates.

CCHOAP includes the presidents of associations representing over 15,000 homeowners including Brandermill, Hampton Park, Ashbrook, Salisbury, Foxcroft, Foxfire, Brandy Oaks, Bayhill Pointe, Marlboro, Banwell, Manchester Heights, Providence Farms, Rocky Run and Donegal Glen. Many of the associations represented are in the Route 360 corridor where growth has been the leading topic. While the presidents of the associations are represented, Brindle acknowledged that it is unknown how many homeowners of those associations agree with CCHOAP's goals, but added that the presidents "represent the majority and the spirit of their communities."

A number of persons impacted by the pledge see flaws in the contract.

"I'm sure their intentions are good, but they are misguided and, in several instances, uninformed," said one source who spoke on condition of anonymity. "If they think the county is slow to act now, these procedures will slow the process considerably. I'd like to know what taxes they're proposing to raise to pay for all of this."

Even if there was debt service available, it would be nearly impossible to build enough schools within five years to eliminate the more than 300 trailers currently being utilized at county schools. "To plan, design and build one high school takes five years," said Debra Marlow, the school system's director of community relations. "Capital funds from a referendum would be phased in over six years."

The county has placed a high priority on the amount of debt service it has to maintain its AAA bond rating, which allows Chesterfield to borrow money at the most favorable rates.

"Some of what is outlined in the [contract] has already been accomplished," said the county's Director of Public Affairs Don Kappel. "The board voted in August on an efficiency study. Three consecutive citizen satisfaction studies have told us that more

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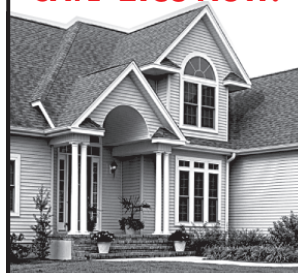
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from PLEDGE, page 2

than 90 percent of our residents find the county to be a good or excellent place to live, and we receive high marks for quality of life overall."

"These proposals would cause irreversible damage to the economy of Chesterfield and artificially inflate the cost of housing and real estate assessments," Tyler Craddock, spokesperson for the Richmond Home Building Association, insisted. "They are driven by the misguided views of people who have...achieved...homeownership and now want to deny it to others. These proposals would also more

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an alarm call. Bank employees reported that the male suspect entered the bank, approached a teller and demanded money. He then left the bank on foot with an undisclosed amount of money. No one was injured during the robbery.

The suspect is described as a white male in his late 30s or early 40s, 200 pounds, and 5 feet, 11 inches to 6 feet tall. The suspect was wearing a brownish-burgundy t-shirt, blue jeans and a dark blue UVA baseball cap. He was also wearing sunglasses.

If you have information about this robbery, please contact the police

greatly politicize the planning process when...[it should be]...driven by sound engineering and planning practices and not dictated by mob rule."

"Several of the ideas expressed in the proposals, such as Adequate Public Facilities policies and moratoria on residential constructions, are not allowed under state law," added Craddock. "It is very odd that any group would be asking candidates for public office to agree to a proposal that would violate their oath of office."

"Some counties have enacted

moratoriums, and some people challenge the view by the county attorney that a moratorium is illegal," responded Brindle. "You can defer a rezoning for a year or you can deny it. The developer can reapply after the infrastructure is in place."

Planning Director Kirk Turner declined comment on the specifics of the contract, but said "the county encourages input from citizens. We want their participation and ideas about growth management."

CCHOAP began three months ago as a counterbalance to what

Brindle said is undue influence by developers and their legal representatives. Though CCHOAP wants to "create a substantial voice and voting block," it has disavowed endorsing candidates. Brindle says he has resisted contacting about 10 candidates who wanted to talk to him regarding the upcoming election.

When the group organized last spring, CCHOAP members decided against joining the Alliance for Responsible Growth of Chesterfield, another citizen group focused on growth management.

department at 748-1251 or Crime Solvers at 748-0660.

Body recovered from pond

A woman's body was discovered in a pond near her home in the Trophy Club apartment complex on Sept. 9.

Police said Courtney L. Sheap, 44, of the 2400 block of Trotter's Lane, was reported missing shortly after 10 a.m. that same day. Sheap's body was discovered at about 3:30 p.m. by public safety officials. The cause of death will be determined following a forensic exam by the State Medical Examiner's Office.

Police continue their investigation.

Two fatal crashes

Separate automobile crashes recently claimed the lives of two men.

Anthony T. Stefano, 22, of the 3000 block of Long Oaks Drive, was killed on Sept. 8 around 1:27 a.m. in a single-vehicle crash in the 3700 block of South Old Hundred Road.

According to police, Stefano was traveling north in a 1999 BMW 328i sedan when he left the roadway, struck several trees and overturned. He was ejected during

the crash. Stefano was transported to St. Francis Medical Center where he later died.

In another crash, an unidentified man was killed in the 6800 block of Jefferson Davis Highway on Sept. 10 around 2:38 a.m. His 1998 Honda Civic was traveling north when it left the roadway, striking a tree, a parked car and a mobile home.

The driver was pronounced dead at the scene. His identity is being withheld until family members are notified.

Police continue to investigate these crashes.