

April 3, 2015

To: City of Ann Arbor Planning Commission

From: Woodcreek Homeowners Association Board (Kym London, President; Rich Mazzari, Treasurer, Michael Homel, Secretary; Jennie Allan; Blair Gerdes; Linda Plona)

Re: "South Pond Village"

The Woodcreek Homeowners Association Board of Directors urges the City of Ann Arbor Planning Commission to recommend that City Council deny the South Pond Village Development Plan in its current form.

When WHA board members learned about this project last July, we did not anticipate opposing it. It fits the single-family zoning for which we lobbied. The proposed homes are relatively similar to ours. From the outset, we shared our concerns with the development team and expected they would be solved to mutual satisfaction. The developers did make some changes, especially at the north end of the site along Huron River Drive. Also, they designated land for a neighborhood park, although the amount of land is insufficient (see below).

However, the WHA board strenuously objects to SPV's use of Chalmers Drive as the sole egress/access route. For reasons we detail below, we call on you to either recommend denial of the project or order a more practical, safer traffic plan. At the January 21 PC meeting, we suggested alternate auto routes, especially for outbound traffic. Last month staff said it was considering that. But today's staff report rejects the Arborland option with little explanation. We are deeply disappointed that the unsafe and inconvenient Chalmers route remains the sole egress and access.

The SPV site plan violates public safety needs. First, dependence on a single egress/access point (the west end of Woodcreek Blvd) could be disastrous in case of emergency; this alone justifies a second access road separate from the west end of Woodcreek Blvd.

Most important on a daily basis, there is no traffic light at Chalmers Drive and Washtenaw and no future prospect of a light. Washtenaw Avenue is already overburdened, congested, and often gridlocked much of the daylight hours, seven days a week. Turning right from Chalmers to Washtenaw means long waits due to traffic flows not only from Washtenaw itself but from traffic leaving the west edge of Arborland and vehicles from northbound Pittsfield. Frequent traffic back-ups occur, blocking Chalmers completely.

Worse yet, turning left or east from Chalmers into Washtenaw is difficult and dangerous. Chalmers drivers must cross two lanes of westbound traffic to enter a center turn lane. When they try to do this, one lane of westbound vehicles may stop, while vehicles in the other lane do not. That's one danger. Next, one enters that center turning lane, only to find eastbound traffic appearing there too, ready to turn left into Chalmers or Paesano's driveway. This is obviously unsafe.

SPV would worsen public safety at the Chalmers-Washtenaw intersection. The developer's traffic study claims only a few more cars would go southbound on Chalmers. We invite you to do the math yourself. SPV plans 75 homes. Based on Woodcreek auto usage, that means about 130-140 vehicles. In addition, there would be pizza delivery cars, UPS, FedEx, lawn service trucks, other commercial vehicles servicing SPV, plus friends and family visiting SPV homes. Woodcreek has 87 homes and there are about 30 along Chalmers. SPV's approval would increase the number of households using Chalmers by 64 percent.

That means more cars waiting on southbound Chalmers at Washtenaw. The current wait time and danger to enter Washtenaw are already bad. But with two or three cars lined up, wait time, impatience, risk taking and danger jumps exponentially. Why would we want this?

Washtenaw's extreme congestion has earned a failing grade from the State of Michigan. The developer argues SPV's traffic impact would not be significant. After all, there is no lower grade than "F." But the developer and his team do not live here and experience Chalmers-Washtenaw every day as we do.

So, one might say, why not avoid this intersection by going far out of the way--- northward on Chalmers to Huron River Drive, then back to Washtenaw via Huron Parkway or Hogback? Chalmers is unpaved, with frequent holes or craters. The northern third is narrow and winding with blind curves. There are no street lights, adding nighttime risks. Children playing close to the road and school bus stops add additional problems, especially in early morning and late afternoon dim light and darkness. Huron River Drive is also narrow and winding, unfit for the increasing volume of traffic it now carries. One of the city's fatal auto accidents occurred at Chalmers and Huron River Drive last summer. Thus, increasing traffic on the northern half of Chalmers is also bad planning practice.

Some history: the reason the 48-acre site is undeveloped and the reason why PC and City Council rejected Peters Builders Company's development plan over a decade ago is that Chalmers auto access is impractical. It threatens public safety and makes an already congested traffic situation even worse.

While the Chalmers-Washtenaw intersection is our main reason for advocating denial, we have other, secondary concerns. First, Chalmers from Paesano's northward to the Woodcreek entrance is not only unpaved; it frequently has ponds, craters, holes, and deep ruts. City staff wants it paved, and the developer is willing to have future SPV homeowners assessed. But Chalmers homeowners, the original area residents, have always strongly opposed paving. Have they changed their views? If not, is the city going to pave it over their objection and add insult to injury by levying substantial assessments on their properties? Will the many retirees and moderate income people in these houses afford a jump in property taxes?

Next, as indicated above, we need adequate active-use local parkland like other neighborhoods in the city have. The city did not enforce this requirement when it approved Woodcreek twenty years ago. SPV's current developer has added a single acre (his original site plan had nothing). The city should abide by its own guidelines and adjust the site plan to meet PROS park acreage standards for our entire area, including Woodcreek and Chalmers residents.

Finally, we object to the use of Algebe Way as an auto route. That will increase traffic on Meadowside, a winding road not designed for increased traffic volume. Speeding, already a problem, will worsen. Amend the plan to make Algebe emergency access only. On this point, the developers have repeatedly voiced their willingness to accept our view on this. It's city staff that insists on Algebe as a street.

In conclusion, development that fits zoning is good. But when it makes a terrible traffic situation even worse, it should not occur. Instead, we can devise an outcome that works for not just for developers but for residents as well.