



LAKE NORMAN & MOORESVILLE

Save Davidson group aims to save town's soul

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A grass-roots organization with origins on social media is making waves in this college town by demanding transparency from elected leaders and mobilizing volunteers to stop development its members say will hurt the town.

Save Davidson, now with more than 1,500 Facebook members and 60 dedicated volunteers, hopes to shine a light on important issues that could change Davidson's identity and to educate voters for the upcoming election in November, group leaders said.

“We’re doing everything we can to advocate for the citizens and help the citizens have a voice where there was none,” said Save Davidson founding member Denise Beall.

While Save Davidson is concerned with the pace and growth of other potential developments, group leaders said they are for now focusing on the town’s most pressing concern: how to keep the town-owned, vacant Beaty Street property from turning into the proposed mixed-use Luminous site.

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Beaty Street was the topic during the Save Davidson’s first SHINE — Sharing Helpful Information Now with Everyone — meeting Aug. 3 at the D9 Brewing Co. in Cornelius; more than 100 people attended.

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I’M COMING OUT TO SAVE DAVIDSON.

Evelyn Carr, 86 and a lifelong Davidson resident

On July 11, the Davidson Board of Commissioners, in a 3-2 vote, agreed to enter into contract negotiations with Davidson Development Partners.

The vote allowed the town to move forward with the developer’s latest Luminous project, a mixed-use development with up to 138 residential units, a 135-room hotel, 28,000 square-feet of commercial space and a seven acre-park with a pond, gazebo and walking trails on approximately 18 acres on Beaty Street.

Beall and numerous other Save Davidson members maintain the property was purchased by the town in 1985 from the Clontz family for specific use as a park or green space, and as such, current elected leaders should keep in accordance with these intentions.

Government transparency regarding the property has been an issue, as well.

When residents asked to see documents about the sale of the Beauty Street property, town officials replied there was no documentation matching their request, Beall said.

But documents obtained through public records requests, including the property's purchase contract and numerous business letters, showed the property owner wished the land could be sold for use of park, said David Sitton, who is running for a town board of commissioner's seat, at the Aug. 3 SHINE meeting.

And that was the "match that lit the fire around this," Sitton told audience members.

"That is the reason why for a lot of people in town there's a really a feeling now as a result of that, we're no longer having an open and honest conversation about where we going with our town," said Sitton.

Davidson Town Spokeswoman Cristina Shaul said the current plan being considered for the Beauty Street property does include a park, as have several plans prior to this one.

"The Beauty Street property was not deed restricted to only allow a park," Shaul said. "Multiple plans for that property since 1996 have shown mixed-use development, all which have included a park."

But for Save Davidson members, the Beauty Street project set forth a broad set of concerns, including the lack of public infrastructure to existing development and the town's expectation for growth, as well as a lack of citizen input on the future of the property, Sitton said.

Beall said the group is concerned with the high-density growth the project includes as well as the fact the proposed park would serve the hotel's clientele and not Davidson residents.

"A hotel in a residential area with 'open space' is very different from dedicated park space, especially with transient nature of hotel patrons," Beall said. "If the town sells the property it no longer controls the park."

Besides development projects, Save Davidson is also preparing voters for the upcoming election by hosting political debates and forums.

The Save Davidson group has become so significant — and noticeable around town with their signature bright green shirts and yard signs — they could influence the town’s mayoral and board of commissioners election in a few months.

“We’re intending to be an important block of voters come November,” said Jamie Ramsden, Save Davidson member, during the SHINE meeting.

Six of the 13 candidates running for the five-seat Davidson Board of Commissioners, including Sitton, and two of the three candidates running for mayor attended the Aug. 3 SHINE meeting.

Current Commissioner Jim Fuller, who is running for re-election, mentioned the town’s five core values or guiding principles.

“Core value five says we are committed as a town to be a small town,” Fuller said to raucous applause. “I see our obligation as working to implement that core value.”

Save Davidson plans to be a powerful force after the election, as well.

“We’re not here until Beaty gets resolved to our satisfaction,” said Ramsden. “We intend to be here for the foreseeable future.”

The town has created a committee to negotiate a tentative purchase contract with the developers, Shaul said. Lawyers will then review it and then the contract will go before the board of commissioners, but Shaul said she is unsure how long this could take.

Save Davidson plans to continue to sell merchandise, hold bake sales and lemonade stands as fundraisers and a “Save Dave-a-palooza” concert prior to the election, Ramsden said.

Sale proceeds goes toward printing informational flyers, potential legal counsel and the creation of a spiral-bound book on the history of Beaty Street, Beall said.

Barbara Bryan, who has lived in Davidson since 2003, said Save Davidson wants Davison to remain the quaint town they grew up in or moved to.

The group is also made up of a diverse and and genuine group of people, she said.

“I’ve never seen this kind of getting together,” Bryan said.

Evelyn Carr, 86 and a lifelong Davidson resident, said she attended the SHINE meeting because she doesn’t think the town needs a hotel like the one proposed to be built on Griffith Street — another development the group has in its sights.

“I’m coming out to save Davidson,” said Carr.

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