



## BUSINESS

# Davidson wants development, but these citizens are fighting to make wooded land a park

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“Woods, not neighborhoods!” was the chant that could be heard from blocks away outside Davidson Town Hall Tuesday evening, as a crowd of about 40 marched through pouring rain to protest a proposal to sell and develop a publicly owned site.

The town Board of Commissioners is considering the sale of 19 acres near Beaty Street to a private developer for a project that would include residences, a hotel, shops and restaurants, as well as a 6.5-acre park.

The group, named Save Davidson, hoped to use the protest as a greeting for town commissioners, who had initially planned to consider the proposal at their board meeting later that evening. However, that item was removed from Tuesday's agenda and could be heard at a later date.

Opponents of the development plan say the wooded area should be used for a park. The area surrounding Beaty Street includes many of Davidson's low-income residents, and some protesters said that developing on the land would leave those people without a true green space nearby.

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Davidson residents protest a plan to sell town land to a developer.

Matthew Kaminer

“Parks, not parking lots!” the marchers chanted.

“This is the only active option for many of these families and homes,” Ben Beall said. “It’s not only about a park; it’s about a park for the community and the people that need it the most, and the town needs to observe that and do the right thing.”

Protesters also said that the development plan would violate the integrity of a 1985 agreement between the town and the late Venie Clontz, who sold the land to Davidson. While the land does not have a deed restriction, Clontz expected it to eventually be turned into a public park or recreation area, according to a document the group provided.

The proposal by Davidson Development Partners, for a project to be called Luminous, includes buying the property for \$1.65 million. The plan includes a \$1 million, 6.5-acre public park, built around a pond on the site, as well as the construction of new shops and restaurants, 132 condominiums, a 100-room hotel, 11 single-family houses, 21 townhouses and the Davidson Learning Center, a facility for community-wide educational programs. The project would target Baby Boomers looking to move into retirement while maintaining an active lifestyle.

“These people are looking for a place to grow rather than age, and to do so actively, mentally and physically,” the development proposal reads. “Luminous is for them, or really, for all of us.”

The protesters also said they want more accountability from Davidson officials.

“The number one goal is to get transparency and ethics back in Town Hall, because across Davidson, people are mad,” said Denise Beall, one of the protest’ leaders.

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