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Group Appeals County Support For Fair Hill Development

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A group of Elkton residents is appealing a recent county decision giving concept approval to a development connecting to the controversial Aston Pointe subdivision near Fair Hill.

Led by the anti-sprawl group Appleton Regional Community Alliance, eight other residents filed the petition last week in Cecil County Circuit Court. The appeal comes nearly a month after the planning commission unanimously approved the subdivision's concept plan.

Newark, Del.-based developer William Stritzinger's project would bring 74 homes to 72 acres directly southeast of the community and golf course planned near Fair Hill, also developed by Stritzinger.

Last summer, board members voted to deny concept approval because the Wohner development depended on water sources and roads in Aston Pointe, which had not been added to the county water plan at that time.

Towson, Md.-based G. Macy Nelson, the group's lawyer, said the previously rejected proposal must be reviewed by the county's Technical Advisory Committee before being re-submitted to the planning board. "Once a concept plan is disapproved, it has to go back to the beginning of the process," he said.

Clara Campbell, legal counsel for the planning commission, did not return phone calls for comment. The nearly 300-home Aston Pointe development involves a land-swap deal with the Newark Country Club in Delaware.

For almost two years, county commissioners hesitated to add more than 400 acres in northeast Cecil County including Aston Pointe to the county's map for water and sewer services. They said Stritzinger's attempt to include the area in the plan was blocked by doubts over how much water he could draw from his wells.

As he tried to convince commissioners to add his property to the water plan, Stritzinger also submitted development plans for the Wohner property to the planning board for approval. Planning officials rejected the subdivision's concept plans, leading to court action against the decision. In early January, visiting Judge Raymond Beck upheld the June 2005 planning commission decision.

Stritzinger saw his fortunes change when he revealed later that month that tests conducted on the property's five wells indicated they could yield more than 626,000 gallons of water per day. An amendment adding his property to the water plan was needed, he said, to allow the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to confirm the project's water availability.

Hoping to spark MDE testing on the property, county commissioners voted 3-2 on Jan. 31 to approve the amendment. Commissioners Phyllis Kilby and William Manlove cast the dissenting votes.

Finally included in the water and sewer plan, Stritzinger re-submitted his development plans for the Wohner property to the planning board in March.

Last month, ARCA filed an appeal of the water-plan amendment in the Cecil County Circuit Court.

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