

# Coalition Update

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## The Villages at Five Points development: There's good news and bad news

In an effort of good will and to communicate with members of the Citizens Coalition, developers Joe and Craig Hudson and Mike Lynn (developer of Sea Colony and Savannah's Landing) introduced their plans to the Coalition for some 200 acres of AR-1 land to be known as the Villages at Five Points. Their plan called for 586 dwellings in the form of apartments, townhouses, condominiums, first-time-buyer homes "upscale" single family units and a number of professional offices. It also included a commercial site which will support a grocery store, additional shops and a bank. To help the community swallow this "huge sugar pill" the developers included some 50 acres of open space and miles of multi-use recreational trails.

It comes as close to being a bona fide RPC (Residential Planned Community) as we have seen offered by any Sussex developer.

In our opinion the development had too many flaws and created too many unanswered questions for County Council to approve it:

**1. Location.** The Five Points intersection is rated level of service (LOS) "F". Which means it is failing. Also, we have in hand a letter from DeIDOT that asserts that no more development will be permitted in the Five Points area (it was written after DeIDOT okayed Lowe's). Further, a memorandum of understanding between DeIDOT and the County states that development will not be permitted on roadways rated LOS "D" or lower.

**2. Traffic.** DeIDOT's current assessment of the Hudson's project is that regardless of the current traffic situation, when it is completed in seven years, Savannah Rd. will rate a LOS of "F". The developers plan to signalize its western entrance/exit near Arby's on Savannah Rd. This was a bad decision. With seasonal gridlock already commonplace at Five Points, the addition of this signal will only exacerbate the problem. The Coalition advocated no entrance west of Old Orchard Road (RD. 269). It makes more sense to realign Old Orchard Rd. and create a single signal than to have

two so close to Five Points. DeIDOT listened to our concern: and although the Coalition recommended a right in, right out access across from Arby's the County and DeIDOT ignored our requests.

### Apathy hurts us all

Where was the community when the Villages of Five Points came before the Planning Commission and County Council? It seems everyone was too busy to raise a voice or even an eyebrow to question how such a massive project can be built on Lewes' gateway. We heard not a whimper from the city of Lewes or nearby residents. DeIDOT also did little to support their letter to Council of August 5, 1998 wherein it stated: "...with the construction of this use (the proposed Lowe's store at Five Points) there will be a serious lack of capacity for future uses along Route One and Nine in this area. For example it appears that if Lowe's builds, there likely can be no further uses allowed in the Five Points area which would significantly impact the seasonal Saturday peak hour problem without resulting in a level of service below 'D'. It certainly makes you wonder why the State has allowed further development at Five Points.

As a recent Board of Adjustment hearing Wal-Mart requested an expansion of parking into an AR-1 district. Not a single local resident attended the meeting. The Coalition even prepared a detailed analysis why the big box category killer shouldn't be granted a variance (its "hardship was mainly self-imposed as we saw it), yet no one from Old Landing Road or nearby communities raised so much as an eyebrow or voiced concern. Frustrating.

The result was that the variance was approved and now Wal-Mart may add parking in the AR-1 zone and they can have a much larger store to boot! Further, they won't have to comply with the Highway Corridor Overlay Zone requirements that establish setbacks and parking lot landscaping.

Now that Wal-Mart is coming, who will be leaving? The Coalition needs your voice and your concern.

**3. Open Space.** The developers extol the virtues of their development as utilizing open space, providing bike lanes, sidewalks and the like but we are still uncomfortable with its size. Overall density is not unreasonable, but the sheer numbers are frightening. With 586 units, many of them condos and townhouses bound to draw seasonal owners and renters (read 3-4 cars per unit) and another 150 homes across the tract at Nassau Station and who knows how many more homes on other unspoken parcels on or near Old Orchard Rd., the picture looks grim.

**4. Safety.** Savannah Rd. is a key emergency route for ambulances and fire rescue and an evacuation route. Establishing further roadblock do not bode well for such uses. Yes, the developers

sweet-talked everyone into accepting their magnanimous offer of providing acreage for emergency service, fire or other public use. What good is it if the roads are clogged with traffic?

**5. Quality of Life.** The bottom line is how the development "siege" on our area will affect water quality, wells and the aquifer, sewer capacity, air and water pollution? These are but a few concerns that were simply ignored by Council and all agencies involved.

The Coalition is dedicated to supporting responsible land use, however when a project such as this comes along we have to evaluate all of the consequences, not simply the aesthetics of the design but its impact on the community. We have all seen RPC proposals that do not meet the Residential Planned Community standard. Rather, they appear to be a "really packed community." This is something that the County must take a fresh look at and specify how much open space and density is appropriate.