



The Progress-Index

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The move to upscale housing in Petersburg

Does a new, more expensive housing and business development create a fracture in the social fabric of Petersburg?

That was the underlying question during a recent Petersburg City Council meeting concerning a rezoning issue.

Petersburg City Council approved rezoning land on County Drive from Light Industrial to Mixed-Use. The developer — PBLF, LLC — plans on building high-end apartments at 2740 County Drive. The development would house more than 400 people and residents would have to meet a minimum income requirement of \$60,000 annually. Very few, if any, schoolchildren were expected to live in the complex.

The apartment complex would target professionals from Fort Lee who will be coming to the area in the next few years due to the Base Realignment and Closure process that will nearly double the size of the Army post.

Some local residents claimed the development would further the housing divide between lower-income people and those more well off.

While we share the concerns over an economic housing divide, that worry was slightly misplaced in this case. Petersburg needs to develop attractive, and in some cases, high-end housing for those moving to the area due to Fort Lee. If not, the economic benefits of Fort Lee's expansion will largely miss Petersburg.

Other areas — such as Chesterfield and Prince George counties — will garner the majority of the economic benefits if Petersburg does not step up to the development plate.

The concern over an economic housing divide should be aimed at the need to redevelop existing, larger, lower-economic neighborhoods. New development shouldn't be the concern. It is making a push to improve existing housing that is the primary concern.



Groups such as Virginia LISC — Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corp. — are planning to move forward with ways to redevelop poorer neighborhoods. LISC is seeking to spark redevelopment in four Petersburg neighborhoods — Battersea, Rome Street, Westview and Birdville and Halifax and Blandford.

The ultimate goal of the LISC agenda is to increase the availability of affordable housing and business spaces in the four neighborhoods. If successful, the projects will go a long way in addressing concerns over an economic housing divide.

Concerns about an economic housing divide should be brought before the City Council, but not when it is considering a new, private development. Instead, the question should be asked of Council: What is being done to redevelop poor neighborhoods? What role should tax money or tax credits play in fostering redevelopment of poor neighborhoods? What can the city do to help private business redevelop poor neighborhoods?

That is were the concern over an economic housing divide should be addressed.

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