

Innsbrook neighbors concerned changes will bring more traffic

BY CAROL HAZARD - PUBLISHED: July 21, 2011

Traffic was the No. 1 concern of people who attended a community meeting Wednesday evening about plans to transform the Innsbrook Corporate Center in western Henrico County.

“I can’t get out of our neighborhood as it is,” said a resident who lives in the area.

The 20-year plan is to reconfigure about 188 acres of the 630-acre park into a place where people live, work and play — not just work.

The park would be home to about 6,000 residents and about 10,000 new workers. Many residents would work there.



“Anybody here afraid of change?” asked Paul W. Kreckman, president of the Innsbrook Owners Association and vice president of Highwoods Properties, which owns about one-third of the office park.

“I understand that the change we have been talking about seems a little scary,” Kreckman said.

Change requires a lot of communication, feedback and good thought, he said. “Tonight is a continuation of that.”

About 80 people attended the meeting at The Place at Innsbrook.

Some wanted assurance that buffer zones will be kept in place or that buildings wouldn’t be taller than the planned 45-foot-tall ones closest to neighborhoods.

Highwoods is asking the county to allow office buildings as tall as 250 feet, or about 16 floors, in the center part of the office park, but 12 stories are more likely.

The design calls for a walkable community, where people would be less reliant on automobiles. Park areas and lakes that are already there would be more accessible.

More travel routes and a traffic circle would be added to ease the flow of traffic. But there will be no getting around it, Kreckman said. “The half-hour rush hour might become a one-hour rush hour.”

“I think it has great potential,” said Karen Bess, who lives nearby and attended the meeting. “I love to walk to restaurants.”

Traffic is good now compared with in Washington, she said. “It’s not a nightmare, but we want to make sure it doesn’t become a nightmare.”

“We’re both open-minded,” said Carl Bess, her husband. “We embrace change.”

Plans call for an additional 3.5 million square feet of office space, 415,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, up to 1,000 hotel rooms, and 6,000 apartments and residential condominiums.

Webb Tyler, a longtime resident of the area who owns investment properties near the office park, said he supports the plan. “It’s an evolutionary process,” he said.

“Innsbrook has come a long way from being a farm,” Tyler said. “This is an improvement. It’s the new urban lifestyle, not just suburbia.”

Many young professionals don’t want to mow grass. “I’m a little older — and I don’t want to mow grass, either,” he said.

The park, which was started in the late 1970s, is an economic driver for Henrico. But the original plan was based on the suburban model that relies on the automobile. It’s time for change, Kreckman said.

“Think of the Fan District only with taller buildings.”

Kreckman addressed other major concerns. They include:

- Noise and light: Outdoor music would be stopped at 10 p.m., as it is now. Lighting would be at street level.
- Property value: \$2.4 billion in investments would increase all property values.

The plan, while not yet approved by Henrico, is in keeping with long-term county objectives, Three Chopt District Supervisor David A. Kaechele said.

“It conforms to our future land-use plan,” said Kaechele, while acknowledging concerns about traffic and whether the updated park would be compatible with neighborhoods.