

Knox Metropolitan Planning Commission – January 8, 2009
John King (Hines, Sparks, Branum, et al) / 11-B-08-RZ
Statement of Opposition

As the representative body of a 136 unit, 100+ acre, majority owner-occupied condominium community located at 1393 Cherokee Trail, the Cherokee Bluff Council of Co-Owners, Inc. (“Cherokee Bluff”) has opposed the creation of a high density rental district throughout the administrative and legislative processes which begat The Woodlands of Knoxville and Quarry Trail developments located at Cherokee Trail and Edington Road. Cherokee Bluff continues its opposition to the further high density, rental development of the Cherokee Trail area in the case of John King’s bid to rezone the Hines-Sparks-Branum properties in order to develop as many as 110 units of student rental apartments with 413 bedrooms in 90 buildings on +/- 25 acres bounded more or less by Edington, Willoughby, Greeley Ford and Wells Roads.

Not only is the severe topography of the area incompatible with this type of high density development, the transportation infrastructure is woefully inadequate for the traffic loads to be generated. Cherokee Trail – a “minor collector” - is already overwhelmed with far more traffic than it was designed for and which is safe. Edington is equally inadequate, if not moreso. The vast majority of the traffic ultimately flows in and out of the Cherokee Trail-Alcoa Highway interchange. Although the recent installation of a traffic light at this interchange at the UT Med Center (“UTMC”) entrance has temporarily alleviated the worst of the back-ups there at peak times, the approval, construction and occupancy of more and more bedrooms along Cherokee Trail and its feeders, Edington and Candora, will inevitably cause these roads and their intersections to increasingly become unacceptably congested and dangerous. The potential exists, based on previous rezonings of substantial properties in the vicinity to Planned Residential (PR), for what can only be presumed is intended to be even more high density rental development along Cherokee Trail and its feeders. Yet there is apparently no plan to improve Cherokee Trail, Edington or the interchange at Alcoa Highway/UTMC in conjunction with these high impact developments coming online. Nor are the out-of-state developers profiting handsomely from these projects being required to contribute to these infrastructure costs.

Throughout this whole process, beginning several years ago in conjunction with The Woodlands/Rose Property rezoning and Use-on-Review, what has been all too apparent is the lack of vision on the part of MPC, Council and Commission in addressing development issues in the Cherokee Trail area (which is bifurcated by the City-County line). These bodies have consistently failed to seize opportunities to identify and influence the highest and best uses of the Cherokee Trail area properties (which the MPC staff – these bodies’ own experts, mind you – have indicated are not well suited to these high density multi-family complexes) as a part of a greater plan for South Knoxville and Knox County. Frankly, it is incomprehensible that the nascent South Knox Waterfront area has not been prospectively identified and targeted as the more appropriate zone for these high-density condo and apartment complexes in near South Knoxville and Knox County. That area is due for redevelopment to higher and better uses and has terrain far more suitable for responsible, aesthetically pleasing high density residential and mixed use development. Developers need to be directed there to do these types of projects. “No” and “not right there” need to become part of these bodies’ lexicon.

Instead, the developers of The Woodlands and Quarry Trail acquired the cheapest land they could and were allowed to clear cut it, excavated it beyond all recognition and they have created massive communities, totally out of scale with their natural and built environments, full of transient students who will not care for these properties as would owner-occupants in the

traditional sense; all of which inevitably results in environmental degradation and premature blight. Then add to that the traffic woes caused by thousands of additional mostly inexperienced, mostly speeding drivers, most of whom are on cell phones while flying up and down the circuitous, paved cart path known as Cherokee Trail. What is being proposed in this rezoning request is not anything different; it is just more of the same.

Ideally, MPC, Council and Commission would (1) acknowledge that there are far more suitable areas for further such developments (the South Knox Waterfront project area) and seize this opportunity to (2) establish a moratorium on such developments along and off of Cherokee Trail until such time as the Historic and Natural Preservation Corridor can be established by Legacy Parks, the Ridgetop and Slope Task Force issues its findings and recommendations; the developers contribute enough to improve Cherokee Trail and Edington Road to an acceptable standard to handle the existing and proposed traffic, and TDOT/UT/UTMC improve the Alcoa Highway-Cherokee Trail interchange.

Since this is Knoxville-Knox County, it is troublingly apparent that most, if not all, of that will likely not occur in this rational sequence ... that is just not how things have been done here historically. So short of that approach, at a minimum, Cherokee Bluff would ask that the relevant landowners/developer be required to (1) meet or exceed each of the MPC staff's proposed requirements (as well as the mandatory establishment of KAT-UT shuttle service and other MPC Staff recommended requirements are formulated for Use-on-Review), (2) contribute substantially to a fund for the relocation of the ill-conceived water tank &/or the Legacy Parks' effort to establish the above-referenced preservation corridor, and (3) meet a heightened standard for preserving the existing, mature vegetation on the property, particularly along the boundaries of the property in order to provide a maximum buffer.