

# Controversial RV Park Rejected By Town Board

October 4, 2017



*Pine Acres resident and President of the East Smithfield Improvement Organization Tony Nixon (right) speaks in opposition to a proposed 148-space RV park during a 4 hour public hearing Tuesday night. Interim Smithfield Planning Director Steve Medlin looks on. JoCoReport.com Photo*

A four hour public hearing was held Tuesday night on a proposed RV Park off Venture Drive near the Outlet Center in Smithfield. Over 70 people attended the lengthy meeting at the Smithfield Town Hall, the majority of those were opposed to the project.

Theron Lee McLamb had requested a Conditional Use Permit to allow 33.32 acres of land he owns to be converted into a recreational vehicle park that would include 148 RV spaces and 48 cabin rentals.

Town of Smithfield Interim Planning Director Steve Medlin said the proposed Smithfield KOA could pose a compatibility issue with the adjacent Pine Acres subdivision on the west side but the

planning department staff had recommended the project be approved. McLamb had offered a 50 foot buffer instead of a minimum 40 foot buffer to mitigate any adverse impacts.

The Smithfield Planning Board voted 4-to-3 during their August meeting to deny the request due to concerns the RV park could devalue adjoining properties.

Selma attorney Chip Hewett represented the developer at the hearing. Hewett called on several experts to testify the park would not devalue nearby homes in Pine Acres and would create additional revenue to businesses. David Gorham of Florida, the former President and CEO of the National RV Park Association said the average party of 3 staying in an RV park spends \$91 per day outside the park for food, fuel and shopping. He called the 33 acre tract of land off Venture Drive an "ideal site" but admitted some still perceive RV parks are "trailer trash" and don't want them in their communities.

Bruce Sawter of Greenville, a commercial real estate appraiser, testified for the developer an RV park would not injure adjacent property values.

Tony Nixon, a resident of Pine Acres and President of the East Smithfield Improvement Organization, questioned why the current RV park plans did not include any outdoor night lights. Nixon also presented photos from a KOA RV park in New Bern that showed unsightly homes and minimal buffers. Hewett objected to the photos being shown during the hearing but the pictures were ultimately allowed.

Nixon said Smithfield doesn't allow mobile homes in the city limits and should not allow RV's.

Another Pine Acres resident, Dr. Oliver Johnson expressed concerns about increased noise, traffic and the transient residents including the inability of being able to monitor for sex offenders who might stay there. Johnson said adjacent property owners have the right to enjoy quietness of their homes.

Mayor Pro Tem Emery Ashley asked if the developers had reached out to the Pine Acres community and learned they had not. Councilman Travis Scott was told there were no plans in place to manage sewage spills. Councilman Steve Rabil questioned if any security would be provided.

Mayor Andy Moore asked if the RV's would have storm tie downs in the event of tornadoes or severe weather and how frequently ownerships in RV parks may change. Moore was told by Gorham that RV's rarely have permanent tie downs. Even though Gorham had owned and sold 4 RV parks, he said park ownership changes rarely occurs.



Keith Brinson, Chairman of the Johnston County Visitors Bureau, speaking for the applicant, said the RV park would be built in three phases. That comment drew several questions from council members who said nothing had been presented publicly to them during the hearing or in the permit application the park was not

be constructed in a single phase.

Councilman Scott noted during the hearing that Mr. McLamb filed the paperwork on June 2nd for the RV Park but did not meet with Sawter, the Greenville appraiser, until September 12th to defend the property values of nearby Pine Acres.

After closing the hearing shortly after 11:00pm, the council voted 4-to-2 to reject the project, siding with the planning board with concerns over adjacent property values. Councilmen John Dunn and Perry Harris were the only two who voted to support the project. Mayor Pro Tem Emery Ashley and Councilmen Marlon Lee, Travis Scott and Steve Rabil voted against. Councilman Roger Wood was absent from the meeting.

Attorney Hewett and McLamb declined to comment after the meeting, nor would they say if they planned to appeal the ruling.