

## 5,000 homes set for Berkeley

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Author: WARREN WISE

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### Document Text

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Gary Mullins and his wife Lenora moved to rural Berkeley County 29 years ago for the peace and quiet.

That's about to change.

Their Marshall Acres Drive home and woodworking business sit across the street from the proposed 5,000-home Cane Bay subdivision and the site of a new high school, the latest in a series of developments to sprout from the forests in Berkeley County.

Charleston developer Ben Gramling of Gramling Brothers Real Estate and Development Co. hopes to develop the 2,051-acre wooded tract with homes, apartments and businesses. About 40 percent of the tract would remain as green space.

He donated 118 acres at the corner of U.S. Highway 176 and Marshall Acres Drive for the new 1,500-student high school, for which ground will be broken in March, to alleviate overcrowding at Stratford High School in Goose Creek.

"Where is the football stadium? Can I watch the games from my porch?" Gary Mullins laughed while poring over a site plan.

Neither he nor his wife plan to protest the new subdivision, which requires a zoning change from agricultural use to mixed-use planned development. "You can't stop progress," Lenora Mullins said. "I'll only miss the trees. I like the birds to have a place to live."

Their neighbor, Palmer Bolton, doesn't like the prospect but sees little he can do about it. He's also worried about property taxes going up.

"I like living in the country," the auto mechanic said. "It's quiet out Council on Monday, where the plan is expected to get a warm reception.

"This is the kind of development we are looking for in Berkeley County," County Supervisor Jim Rozier said.

Residents from nearby New Hope, who recently helped stop a proposed 428-acre housing development off Jedburg Road, like what they've heard about the new subdivision.

Community leader Carroll Cash called it "a move in the right direction."

Resident David Vanosdoll wondered whether there was a plan to widen U.S. 176 from two to four lanes to handle the increased traffic. The county is trying to secure funding to widen the road from Carnes Crossroads to Jedburg Road, Rozier said.

Besides land for the unnamed high school, Gramling has set aside 87 acres for elementary and middle schools. The middle school would be behind the high school while the elementary school would be near the center of the wedge-shaped tract.

The site includes 199 acres for commercial development, 199 acres for multifamily housing and 1,378 acres for single-family homes. Gramling is planning houses that are close together with small setbacks to allow about 40 percent of the tract to remain green space.

The county adopted new rules last fall that let developers build on smaller lots as long as there's enough green space to make the average lot size 14,000 square feet. They require developers to set aside 20 percent of the property's value for commercial development since businesses boost the tax base. The county made the changes after a 71-day moratorium on accepting subdivision applications to get a handle on its explosive growth.

The subdivision includes hiking and biking trails that do not cross roads, which would be built over the trails. Gramling is considering a 100-acre park on either the Cane Bay tract or another large parcel he hopes to acquire behind the proposed subdivision.

"With this type of community, you don't have to leave to go anywhere," Gramling said. "This is a dream and passion of mine."

Gramling's holding company, BMG III LLC, bought the property last year from MeadWestvaco for \$6.2 million, according to Berkeley County records. A handful of timber companies have sold, or are selling, nearly 40,000 acres of timberland on the edges of the Charleston metropolitan area, fueling a land rush by developers. Companies have been selling off forestland as improvements in technology allow them to grow more trees on fewer acres.

Cane Bay Plantation is the latest large housing development to be announced in the Lowcountry, but not the largest.

Last year, developers submitted plans for 5,000 homes on the 6,500-acre Watson Hill tract on S.C. Highway 61 in Dorchester County, but after public outcry, the plan was dropped. The property was sold to another developer who is considering a golf course community. Poplar Grove developers wanted 3,500 homes on 4,500 acres in southern Dorchester County; environmentalists are trying to protect much of the land through conservation easements.

Jane Lareau of the Coastal Conservation League was unaware of the Cane Bay proposal, but said the environmental protection group would have a problem with it if it's built away from urban areas and contributes to sprawl. The property lies on the outer perimeter of the metro area, not far from nearly 5,000 acres of other MeadWestvaco property being eyed by developers along Sheep Island Road.

Gramling said he believes the community would be self-contained and wouldn't contribute to sprawl. "It's live, work, play," Gramling said of Cane Bay. "It gives the community everything."

Contact Warren Wise at 745-5850 or [wwise@postandcourier.com](mailto:wwise@postandcourier.com).

#### BERKELEY COUNTY PLANNED SUBDIVISIONS\*

Cane Bay - 5,000 homes and apartments, U.S. 176

Foxbank - 640 homes, undetermined number of apartments, U.S. 52

Moss Grove - 750 homes, U.S. 52

Spring Grove - 1,000 homes, Old U.S. 52

Tanner Plantation - 1,000 homes, Foster Creek Road

Hawthorne Place - 700 lots, off College Park Road

Other large Berkeley tracts being eyed

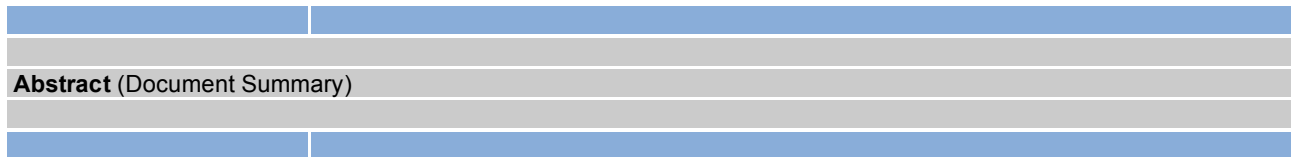
Keystone Tract - 4,600 acres, S.C. 41

Sheep Island Road Tract - 4,900 acres, Sheep Island Road

\*500 lots or more

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