

A Master Plan

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By Jessica Johnson,
Contributing Writer

Developer sees grandeur of 30-year Cane Bay design

Looking at the remnants of a pine plantation and shifting piles of dirt, Cane Bay Plantation's developer sees an active community.

Ben Gramling III, president of Gramling Brothers Real Estate and Development Inc., said his plans for Cane Bay Plantation include 10,000 housing units, an extensive trail system, schools, churches, a hospital and a 120-acre lake. A four-lane, tree-lined boulevard would cut through the development, eventually connecting U.S. Highway 52 in the center of Berkeley County to Interstate 26 at the future Sheep Island Road interchange.

"What we are bringing is a beautiful window to Berkeley County," Gramling said.

The eventual four-lane route, with a 75-foot greenspace buffer, would one day be the gateway to the county, he said.

The vision for the development, northwest of Carnes Crossroad at the intersection of U.S highways 17-A and 176, would materialize over the coming decades, which is why Gramling and Berkeley County plan to sign a development agreement that specifically states what the developer and county will do over the next 30 years.

"It protects both parties long term, so what we build is what we say we are going to build and the county allows us to build what the county agreed for us to build," Gramling said.

Gramling has already won county approval for the first phase, which calls for 5,000 homes on about 2,000 acres. Building a total of 10,000 homes on the 4,500 acres of former timberland was always part of the plan, Gramling said. Starting the first phase was necessary so the Berkeley County School District could begin planning the Cane Bay High School.

Phase 2 planning

Plans for the second phase call for adding roughly 5,000 more housing units on 2,500 additional acres. Gramling is seeking an agreement similar to the one Berkeley County signed with The Parks of Berkeley earlier this year. The Parks of Berkeley lies directly across U.S. Highway 176 from Cane Bay and calls for 13,000 housing units.

The agreement would allow builders to construct homes and commercial areas over the next 30 years using today's zoning laws and restrictions. The proposed agreement also says the developer would build a two-lane boulevard throughout the development and leave room for two additional lanes. When the time comes, the county would widen the boulevard to four lanes.

The proposed agreement also says if the county does not implement impact fees or find other transportation funding, builders would agree to pay construction fees to be used for the transportation needs of the areas affected by the development, Berkeley County Supervisor James Rozier Jr. said.

“(Cane Bay is) a quality development with a very involved developer who has made significant contributions to the area,” Rozier said. “You rarely find that.”

Giving back

Gramling donated \$25,000 each to two rural Berkeley County medical clinics, made financial contributions to Berkeley County’s annual Festival in the Park in Moncks Corner and made donations of land for schools and county services.

Gramling gave Cane Bay Plantation’s corner parcel facing Highway 176 to the Berkeley County School District. Gramling told district officials to take what they needed and he would plan around it. The 108-acre high school site is the most expensive piece of property in the development, he said.

Construction crews cleared the Cane Bay High School site, and in August the reinforced concrete walls began to take shape. The building is scheduled to open in time for the 2008-09 school year.

Gramling also has set aside land near the high school for future middle and elementary schools.

Berkeley County School District board members agreed on Aug. 22 that the district’s next elementary school would be built in Cane Bay Plantation, said Kenneth Coffey, assistant superintendent of operations and facilities for Berkeley County Schools.

Coffey said it’s too early to say which areas the schools would serve. Boundary lines would depend largely on how many homes exist in Cane Bay and nearby neighborhoods when the schools open.

Together, Cane Bay and The Parks of Berkeley may one day accommodate 23,000 housing units. The sheer number of homes and residents has worried some.

“While considerable development is going on in Berkeley County, we have 48 percent of the county that will never be developed; 370,000 acres is protected just as it is forever,” Rozier said.

Those acres are held in permanent conservation easements and national forest land. Added together, the land area of all current proposed developments accounts for just 5% of Berkeley County’s land. Land ordinances prevent developers from building more than three homes per acre. And those proposed developments are limited to growth corridors identified in Berkeley County’s comprehensive plan, Rozier said.

“Some people say there is nothing being done to manage the growth. There are significant things being done,” he said.

How large?

To put the developments into perspective, both Cane Bay and The Parks of Berkeley are larger than either the Charleston peninsula or Daniel Island.

With such a large parcel of land to work with, planners are shaping the communities to manage traffic and growth. Instead of finding places for services after the fact, land for services such as additional schools, county buildings and churches have been set aside. Trident Hospital, for example, has purchased a parcel in the Cane Bay development to serve future residents.

"It's a rare opportunity to actually have things in place ahead of time," Gramling said.

Cane Bay is marketed as a place to live, work, play, shop and worship, said Meredith Hartley, a spokeswoman for Gramling Brothers.

Home prices will range from \$130,000 for town homes to more than \$400,000 for single-family homes.

Centex Homes held a lottery Aug. 26 for its first home sites in Old Rice Retreat, the first neighborhood in Cane Bay. Single-family homes start at \$178,000.

Sivica Homes and FirstCoast Homes also plan to build in Cane Bay. Gramling said he is in negotiations with several other developers.

Whoever builds will have the option of integrating fiber optics in the homes and neighborhoods.

Gramling is working with technology consultant Max Kipfer of Virginia to build a fiber optic network that will be available to each home in the community.

As Internet capabilities and delivery methods change, the connection will be large enough to handle the traffic, Kipfer said.

It also sets up the community for wireless Internet "hot spots," allowing residents to surf the Web from the pool or log on to a Web site and view community Web cams.

Other unique community features include a 120-acre lake for sailing, canoeing and kayaking. Each neighborhood would also have its own greenspace, and no lot will directly back up to another.

The development will feature a paved trail system that people could use without ever crossing over the main boulevard. A master trail would follow the major boulevard and pass under the road when necessary. Each neighborhood would have a trail system that linked to the master trail, taking people through the entire development and leading to commercial areas and schools.

"It's going to be catered to outdoor activity," Gramling said. "I see people walking and riding their bikes to Friday night football games."