

STATE AT ODDS WITH BIRCHWOOD DEVELOPER

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See microfilm for map.

State planners are refusing to give the go-ahead to an Orlando developer who wants to build a housing and shopping complex near Holopaw that eventually would be twice the size of St. Cloud.

Officials at the state Department of Community Affairs say regional and county planners have not adequately addressed the impact on traffic and the environment that construction of such a major project would have on the rural area.

Developer Maury Carter contends, however, his project does meet state standards because it cleared local planning hurdles last year. Slated for 10,000 acres along U.S. Highway 192, east of St. Cloud, the Birchwood development would include 4,800 single-family houses, 444 apartments, two schools, a golf course, 553,000 square feet of retail space and 385,000 square feet of office space.

Development, however, would be confined to only the western 5,000 acres. The remainder still has no approved plans for development.

"We've raised some important concerns regarding its consistency with the comprehensive plan," said Carmen Bishop, a spokeswoman at the state community affairs department.

Every local government in the state is required to have a comprehensive plan, which outlines where and how growth will occur. The document tells how roads, water and sewer systems and other government services will be ensured to newly-developed communities as they are built.

Bishop said some of the state's concerns are as minor as rewording some of the restrictions to make them more enforceable and providing detailed maps showing where preservation areas would be located.

But others are more serious, such as allowing too many septic tanks around Cat Lake and failing to provide land for native animals such as gopher tortoises and sandhill cranes that would be displaced by development, state records show.

"We're shocked that DCA has appealed the order," said Carter, the project's developer. "We thought it was going to go right on through."

Regional planning council members signed off on Carter's project in May 1992, and Osceola County commissioners followed suit, granting their approval in September.

Carter said the next step is to have a meeting of the minds with state, regional and local planning officials to resolve the state's concerns.

"We're trying to evaluate what they want," Carter said. "It would probably be more than a year before we get close to beginning construction."

Planning records show Carter wants to build the community in three phases over the next 20 to 30 years.

Regional planning officials say they also will participate in the meeting with state officials, which is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 13. If a deal can't be reached, the state would have to take the case to court.

"We are going to protect the integrity of our recommendations," said Jerry Livingston, attorney for the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council in Winter Park. "There is a potential it can be settled before it goes to court."

[Illustration]

MAP: Proposed Birchwood development.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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