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Council approves apartment complex,

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A Skyridge Valley homeowner who told Clermont city council members she doesn't want "to look at people on their balconies" from her back yard was one of about a dozen residents who left Tuesday night's meeting enraged and shouting after council voted 3-2 to extend a conditional use permit that will allow construction of a 300-unit apartment complex on 25 acres of land north of South Lake Hospital and south of Skyridge Valley.

Prior to the vote, a number of Skyridge residents spoke to express their concerns about the project, which was approved by council two years ago before their single-family subdivision was even constructed. With the okay for an apartment complex already granted, developer Daryl M. Carter of Maury Carter and Associates came back before council Tuesday night to renew the existing conditional use permit for the project — which, in essence, will give him a two-year window to build.

But Skyridge residents, many of whom complained that an apart-

ment complex bordering their community would lower the property value of their homes, made a plaintive plea to council to deny renewal of the permit, effectively killing the project.

In appeals to council designed to support their claims that adding a multi-family housing complex on the site would negatively impact their neighborhood, residents cited a number of quality-of-life concerns — including the overcrowding of elementary school classrooms and increased water consumption that could affect the subdivision, which is already having

difficulty with water usage. Some residents, including Abraham Torres and Brian Blakeslee, told council the area around Skyridge Valley should be used for single-family homes, not multi-family dwellings.

Other residents said they feared that, due to its proximity to Lake Sumter Community College, the planned apartment complex would be heavily occupied by noisy, party-happy college students who would not be taxpayers.

Councilman Keith Mullins disagreed with the residents, saying that, in his opinion, the apartment

angering homeowners

community would not place a significant burden on schools — and that residents' concern that the complex might be overrun with college students was unfounded due to the fact that the Clermont campus is never going to be a major university, but a branch campus of LSCC and UCP.

Both Elaine Renick and Mayor Hal Turville expressed sensitivity to Skyridge residents' apprehensiveness, with Turville suggesting that council deny the renewal of Carter's permit until he could present "a plan."

Council member Jeff Biddle said

the city had no justification to deny, though, since Carter's project had already been approved by council and was in accordance with the city's comprehensive plan.

"There's no legal reason to deny it now," he said. "It's a legal project, it's an approved project and you just can't run a government on the 'not in my backyard' theory."

Mullins agreed.

"This has been on the books for years," he told the unhappy residents, "so don't come after Clermont for multi-family planning

See **COUNCIL**, page 3A

COUNCIL from page 1A

years before you bought your homes."

Quiet throughout the discussion was council member Marilyn McLoughlin — but when council put the matter up for vote, it was her nod that decided the 3-2 vote to approve the CUP renewal.

For several long seconds after

the vote, Jenkins Auditorium was unnaturally silent as the previously vocal audience members sat in apparent shock and disbelief.

As Turville called for a 10-minute recess before moving on to other business, though, several residents jumped to their feet and angrily swarmed toward council, shouting, hollering and threatening to oust certain members in the next election.

"Guys, once again you failed us," Abe Torres yelled. "You'd

better start looking for work!"

As residents milled around outside during the break, talking to Turville, who suggested to them that they call Mr. Carter and see if you can influence what he's planning to do," Carter exited the building and was met by three or four residents who asked if he would allow Skyridge homeowners to have some input on the project.

"I've been willing to do that all along," Carter said.