

A special meeting of the Design Review Board (DRB) was held on May 22, 2019 at 11:00 a.m. in the City Hall Planning Conference Room, 1911 Boundary Street. In attendance were Vice Chairman Michael Brock, board members Bob Albright, Benjie Morillo, and Kimberly McFann, and Heather Spade, city staff. Board member Rett Bullard was absent.

In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d) as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairman Brock called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

THE OVERLOOK AT BATTERY CREEK, 2705 Satilla Boulevard (19-03 DRB.1)

Applicant: Village Park Homes, LLC

The applicant is requesting approval to make changes to their architectural guidelines.

Ms. Spade read the background on the application from the staff report, a relevant section of the Overlook PUD (planned unit development) agreement relative to the DRB's authority in this PUD, and Section 2.8.4 of the Beaufort Code about PUDs.

She pointed out the summary of changes for this application for The Overlook at Battery Creek.

Richard Schwartz said the development "hasn't worked" and is considered "a failed development." It was originally developed when real estate was "hot," he said, and then it, like other developments, went through the recession. Some came back, but this one hasn't.

To make this development more attainable to people in Beaufort who would like to live there but "maybe need a lower price," Village Park Homes has considered some changes, Mr. Schwartz said. The core of the homes is "unique": attached and detached garages, some with rooms above them, etc. They are trying to make a home there "more attainable," he said.

Mr. Schwartz said it appears the city will allow a slab foundation. A 6" reveal is okay with Village Park Homes, as is the height above finished grade. Staff said they had to "do gutters" in metal, he said, and he appreciates that the city is "trying to keep that look you want."

Village Park Homes would like to discuss "vinyl," Mr. Schwartz said, and would be willing to use "an upgraded vinyl." They use colors and trim to keep vinyl from looking like "the most challenging-looking architectural thing," but they use hardie plank, too – in the 300 homes they've built in Bluffton, for example – at about a 50-50 rate with vinyl, he said.

Jacqueline Mancher said the “goal of 3-stories” that Village Park Homes requested is for the 15 to 20 marshfront lots, which are “a lot bigger” than the other lots. **Steve Smith** said they would keep these within the 50’ height limit because of fire codes.

Mr. Morillo asked if the first floor would be “unconditioned” space. Ms. Mancher said there would be an attached or unattached garage, and the first floor would be livable and still within the height requirement. Vice Chairman Brock said there are homes in his neighborhood that are 3 stories with “not much attic.”

Consideration of “parking structures” at the front of the home, Ms. Mancher said, is for marsh and lagoon lots with views at the back of the home, to make “parking more versatile,” on a “case-by-case basis.” Mr. Schwartz said there’s a house in The Overlook now with the garage in front. Ms. Mancher said 5 lots are on the lagoon. This request would be “mainly for them,” she said, so the garage doesn’t obstruct the lagoon view.

Ms. McFann asked for a photo of the house that has a garage on the front of the house. The applicants said they did not have one, but then Mr. Schwartz found one and showed it to the board.

Continuing the review of the applicant’s requests and staff’s comments, on page 6, Ms. Mancher said this is a request to include vinyl among the possible materials a builder could use to give a buyer “all possible options.” She said the vinyl would be of “a higher quality,” and the board could approve the feel and color of the products before they were approved. The Village Park Homes representatives could also show the board elevations to show how the material would be applied. Mr. Schwartz said he thinks vinyl would be used “sporadically” in the development; the houses “that are available to us” are not “in a line.”

Mr. Schwartz said using vinyl might allow them to “help get through the community in an architecturally beautiful way.” He noted that another builder in The Overlook is using “all hardie.”

Mr. Smith said the trim with vinyl would be hardie or “something that’s compatible,” (e.g., a “cementitious 4-inch trim”). Ms. Mancher said they aren’t trying to change the looks of the homes, just to add variety and more options for the homebuyer. Mr. Schwartz said Village Park Homes has fewer than a quarter of the lots in The Overlook. Homebuyers would still have to go to the neighborhood’s architectural review board (ARB), he said.

Mr. Morillo said vinyl is not a “very sustainable material,” and he’s never seen vinyl “that didn’t look like vinyl.” Mr. Smith disagreed, saying he has used it on houses he’s built “on the water” in different states, and he knows some people have a poor opinion of it, but in many years of building, he thinks it’s “very good.” There are “higher grades” of vinyl, he said, and the colors and trim “make a big difference.”

Mr. Morillo said the reason for using vinyl is “to save money.” Mr. Schwartz said, “It doesn’t have to be painted again, unlike hardie plank.” Mr. Smith said they are “trying to solve a problem,” not being “cheap.” He thinks there have been “failures of builders” in The Overlook, so he thinks sticking with fiber cement materials “might” keep Village Park Homes from “reaching the price point this community needs.” They will be “careful about the architecture,” he said, but he thinks vinyl is the “biggest challenge,” and there are very high-end houses built with vinyl, just like there are with “cementitious material.”

Mr. Smith said it would roughly save \$8,000 per house to use vinyl on them. Examples of Village Park Homes are online, and they’re “very beautiful,” he said, adding that they want to stay in the community and to maintain a good reputation.

Mr. Albright said the vinyl should have to have the shiplap style, not “the flap.” Mr. Smith said they would “have to be careful with that.” In some communities, the shiplap is considered “historic,” and in others it’s not. He personally thinks “the flap would look best,” but if that’s what the board wants, they would do that in this development.

Mr. Morillo asked if current homeowners in The Overlook know about this potential change to permitting the use of vinyl. Ms. Mancher said there haven’t been recent meetings, but in conversations with the current homeowners, they have told her often to find builders who will “build in a similar style” to the existing homes and to “sell homes” in the development so their homeowners’ association fees will be less. She said Village Park Homes wants to make sure its homes are “to the level the community deserves,” but The Overlook “really needs to be completed.” The neighborhood’s amenities are all in, and Village Park Homes isn’t changing anything about the layout, Ms. Mancher added.

Vice Chairman Brock asked how many marshfront lots Village Park Homes has. Ms. Mancher said they don’t have any; they would like to look for a builder who could buy them all and “show us a beautiful product.”

Vice Chairman Brock discussed the vinyl on his house; in his neighborhood, the only problem is “it’s all vinyl.” He said he’d really like to see the material Village Park Homes is proposing to use before making a decision. His main concern with the vinyl is “the look of it,” and he’s concerned about the “domino effect” of Village Park Homes doing 30 homes in vinyl since “you’re really trying to get that price point down.”

Ms. Mancher said “the slab” is about “making these homes more accessible.” Many homebuyers now are retirees, and 50% of their plans have the master bedroom on the first floor.

Mr. Schwartz asked if they could make a compromise and allow vinyl with fiber cement

trim or hardie with vinyl soffits. Ms. McFann said with a high-quality vinyl product and hardie or fiber cement trim, she thinks “it would be probably okay,” and affordability “would be helpful to the community.” Mr. Albright said he agreed with her points.

Mr. Morillo asked if the board could see the vinyl Village Park Homes is going to use, and Mr. Smith said they could and further discussed the type of product they would use. He said, “We could provide you with samples.” Ms. McFann said the DRB would like to see the specs, too. Mr. Schwartz said they would provide a sample board. Ms. Mancher said, “These guys are building in the area” and want to have “a reputation of building homes of high quality.”

Page 7 – Vice Chairman Brock said they would like an option for gutters; staff said this was consistent.

Page 9 – Vice Chairman Brock said on Item #1, there is a typo, and 4” should be 6”. Mr. Smith said that’s correct. There was a discussion about Item #2, and the determination was that it could be exposed and needs to be a quality finish.

Page 9, Item #4 – Vice Chairman Brock said a siding-enclosed chimney “just doesn't feel right in that community.” The current guidelines are that chimneys be masonry. Mr. Smith said the cost of masonry chimneys is \$10,000 per fireplace; if the board doesn’t allow vinyl, “we won’t have chimneys” because of the cost. Mr. Morillo and Vice Chairman Brock agreed that this would be okay. Ms. Mancher said in other communities, Village Park Homes does a vinyl chimney if it is on the side of the house and not visible from the street.

Vice Chairman Brock said in Lowcountry architecture, if there is a chimney, “it needs to be relevant.” Mr. Smith said they are “taking out the lifestyle of a gas- or wood-burning fireplace” if they eliminate vinyl chimneys. Vice Chairman Brock said their desire to get these homes’ prices down seems different than the “lifestyle” of a home that uses hardie plank and has a masonry chimney Mr. Smith said homebuyers will not “want to pay for a masonry unit” because “it’s too much revision,” but if the builder uses “a box unit with the chimney we’re suggesting,” homebuyers might want it.

Vice Chairman Brock suggested that they “could vent it straight out of the wall with no chimney.” Mr. Schwartz said, “We’re good with that.” There was agreement that Village Park Homes could use a side vent fireplace.

Page 10 – Vice Chairman Brock said staff feels these “may be consistent.” Ms. Spade said this was about “synthetic materials in general.”

Page 11 – On Item #1, Mr. Smith said all the windows in the neighborhood are the same vinyl 2-over-1 windows. Ms. Spade said that window material wouldn’t be consistent with what’s in the existing homes. Mr. Schwartz said there are “vinyl windows out there

right now.” Mr. Smith said they meet “all energy and wind codes.”

On Item #3, Mr. Schwartz said Village Park Homes doesn’t have very many shutters on their plans. Mr. Morillo said he’s “never seen fake shutters done right.” Ms. Mancher said shutters are a nice option to have, and the ARB will ensure that they are “done right.” Mr. Smith said it’s not a code requirement to have impact windows or shutters, which he thinks would be “overkill” and isn’t necessary here. He thinks shutters are “a nicer look.” They prefer non-operable shutters, which is “a cost-savings over operable” shutters, because they couldn't be vinyl, so they would be “more expensive.”

Mr. Morillo said he thinks they should have no shutters, rather than vinyl shutters. Ms. McFann said she thinks vinyl shutters are okay. Mr. Albright agreed. Vice Chairman Brock said as long as the shutters are “done right,” the ARB approves them, and they “match the architectural style,” he is okay with them.

On pages 12 and 14, Vice Chairman Brock said he thinks this is all okay.

Vice Chairman Brock said the takeaway of this meeting is that the DRB needs to see the vinyl sample. Mr. Smith said they could bring it to City Hall or set a time for review early to mid-week next week. Ms. Mancher said she would prefer that Mr. Smith meet with the board, so he could provide other options if the board doesn’t approve what he brings.

The board members looked at their calendars for a time to meet and decided on May 31 at 10:00 a.m. Ms. Spade said she would check staff availability and if the same location is available.

Mr. Morillo requested information on the siding to be sent ahead of this meeting. Mr. Smith said he’d do that.

Vice Chairman Brock said they could table approval of the application until next week. Mr. Smith asked if Village Park Homes could submit its plans for plan review before DRB approval. Vice Chairman Brock said the vinyl approval shouldn't hold anything up on Village Park Homes’ end. Ms. Spade said the process is usually to get zoning approval first before it goes to Building Codes.

There being no further business to come before the board, **Mr. Albright made a motion, second by Ms. McFann, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously,** and the meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.