

Front Royal Town council adopts policy on water service; Darr: Policy 'is about getting all the players in the game from the beginning'

by Kevin Seabrooke

The Town Council unanimously adopted a new water and sewer policy Monday night that it hopes will give the town more control over development in Warren County.

"What the town is asking is to be a part of the system up front," Vice Mayor Tim Darr said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "This policy is about getting all the players in the game right from the beginning."

Darr said the way the process is currently set up is not fair to the town.

"After [the county] has gone through all this time and expense to put together a development, the last thing is to come ask us for water," Darr said. "The town is going to be the fall guy. They come to us at the end of the process, at the eleventh hour. There's going to be tremendous political pressure to approve it."

There are eight main points to the new policy, but the first is the most controversial and includes the following: "Any request for water and/or sewer services must be made in writing to the town accompanied by a joint request from the property owner and the county for the property to be boundary adjusted into the town's corporate limits. Such request must be made prior to a rezoning action by the county."

"The key word is 'before,'" Darr said. "The town will determine what are appropriate proffers for the town, not the county."

At Monday's council meeting, Councilman Stan Brooks said the policy was created in response to questions about water and sewer services to proposed developments in Warren County over the past six months.

"This is obviously being driven by the Llewellyn-Brookfield development on the Catlett Mountain and also by the Centex development in the Happy Creek area," Brooks said.

But Darr noted in a phone interview that neither the county nor Centex has actually asked the town for any water yet.

The Centex Homes proposal is for 1,862 houses in "Twin Rivers" off of Happy Creek Road. The Brookfield proposal is for 150 homes off of Catlett Mountain Road on the west side of the Shenandoah's South Fork. Brookfield Homes has an option there on land owned by North River District Supervisor Ron Llewellyn.

"The impact on the town is huge," Brooks said. "The roads and infrastructure that will be needed to tie into such development and the overall impact of our existing development make it imperative that we as a town council try to look into the future and understand how we fit into this whole process."

Darr speculated that issues with a large development will not end with water.

If granted, he said, citizens living in a proposed development such as Twin Rivers will eventually "press for other town services at the cost of people who have lived in town for years."

"Taxes will go up," Darr said. "They'll want the roads, which are not up to VDOT standards, to be brought into the town maintenance program and they will eventually ask for garbage pickup, too."

Warren County Board of Supervisors chairman Richard Traczyk said that the supervisors were in the process of setting up a work session to discuss the new policy.

"We need time to digest it, understand it, talk with council and understand where they're coming from," Traczyk said by telephone. "It looks like annexation is annexation, whatever you call it."

Traczyk said the policy was a "pretty strong statement."

"They're putting themselves in the position to make the decision for us [on development]," Traczyk said. "For them to decide and be the sole decider."

The county is "actively looking at other alternatives" for water and sewer, Traczyk said.

"Not that we're necessarily going to do that," Traczyk. "But we need to look out for our constituents."

Warren County Administrator and Planner Doug Stanley the county needs to be involved in the decisions.

"The County needs to be involved in any process because ultimately the majority of the impacts are on the county in the form of transportation and especially schools," Stanley said.