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**Crowd rallies for development plan**  
**Ashley Hungerford – Staff Writer**

MARIETTA – Increasing density in a neighborhood near Town Center Mall won approval yesterday by the Cobb County Board of Commissioners, even though Chairman Sam Olens expressed opposition.

Supporters – 116 of them at least – showed up to the county's zoning hearing yesterday wearing green stickers advocating the redevelopment. Commissioners voted 3–2 for the project. Helen Goreham, who represents northwest Cobb, also voted against the plan.

The Pacific Group, an Atlanta-based development company, plans to buy and raze the 52 homes in Hidden Forest, as well as Grace Church, all of which sit on 50 acres just north of Town Center Mall.

Pacific has requested to build 1,710 residential units – which commissioners cut to 1,600 units – plus 134,000 square feet of retail and 144,600 square feet of office space. The project also includes a new 31,200 square-foot Grace Church. The project is estimated to cost \$300 million, Southwest Commissioner Joe Lee Thompson said.

But Olens and Goreham took issue with the project's density and effects on traffic. Previous zoning allowed 63 units on the land. The new zoning allows for an additional 1,537 units.

"I can't support it," Olens said. He is especially concerned with language allowing a portion of the residential units to be rentals for "as long as the market conditions exists."

He said that provision is not legally binding, and noted the area already has 12 apartment complexes. He also objected, he said, because county funds could eventually be needed for street improvements.

John Moore, Pacific's attorney, said six separate planning studies supported the project, including Cobb County's most recent comprehensive plan adopted in 2007. Pacific Group also developed the \$450 million mixed-use development West Village in Vinings.

Ms. Goreham said she believes Town Center Mall is a great economic engine, "but it is aging."

"It's time for us to look at it seriously and reinvent the mall," she said, "but the approach we're suggesting right now is faulty."

Twenty-nine nearby residents attended Tuesday to oppose the project.

Carol Brown, chairwoman of the Canton Road Neighbors, asked commissioners to lower the project's density even further. She said the Hidden Forest subdivision was never intended to be developed as higher density.

Another nearby neighbor, D.A. King, asked commissioners to reduce the density by half.

"We will be sealed into our corner subdivision because of this," King said. He is the president of the Dustin Inman Society, an anti-illegal The project calls for three, two-story commercial buildings on Big Shanty Road and two, five-story office buildings on the southwest portion of the development.

The 1,600 residential units will be divided between town-homes, flats, senior-living units and village condominiums above the retail shops. Before the board lowered the number of units, Pacific had planned for 94 townhouses, 80 flats, 1,351 condominiums and 185 senior-living units.

Kevin Doyle, of the Livable Communities Coalition, said his group believes the project "represents smart growth." That recommendation is based on 50 criteria, including accessibility, environmental protection, community needs and density. The Hidden Forest development is the first to be rated by that group.

Hidden Forest, between Interstates 575 and 75, now sits with the Town Center Community Improvement District, a self-taxing area that promotes infrastructure improvements, according to the application.

ahungerford@mdjonline.com