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Peyton uses first-ever veto on Baymeadows development proposal

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Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton today vetoed an agreement that would have let a developer build 1,400 homes on the fairways of Baymeadows Golf Club.

Peyton struck down the City Council's approval of a "fair share" application by D.R. Horton. Peyton's veto means Horton cannot proceed with its plan to close the 18-hole golf course and turn it into upscale housing.

Peyton said concerns about how the development would worsen traffic on Baymeadows Road triggered his veto.

Two weeks ago, City Council voted 11-8 to allow the development in exchange for Horton doing at least \$4.9 million of road work on bumper-to-bumper Baymeadows Road. Horton filed its application through the city's fair share program that lets development add traffic on over-capacity roads if the developer will pay to help widen roads.

Peyton's veto is the first time he has used that authority since he became mayor in 2003. It also marks the first rejection of a fair share application. Previously, the council and the Mayor's Office have supported 180 applications since the city began the fair share program in 1998.

The council's past vote in favor of Horton's application would not be enough to override Peyton's veto. The council must muster at least 13 votes for an override.

Horton wanted to build 1,200 condominiums, 200 houses, 150,000 square feet of general office space and 60,000 square feet of retail on the north side of Baymeadows Road, to the east of Interstate 95. The golf course is zoned for the kind of development.

However, traffic congestion on Baymeadows Road is severe enough that it's considered a failing road by the city's transportation planning division. Under those circumstances, the city refuses to approve a development unless the developer successfully applies for a fair share contract.

Horton's fair share contract would have built turn lanes, closed median openings, and realigned an intersection on Baymeadows Road. Horton also agreed to donate 5 acres of land valued for a future Jacksonville Transportation Authority transit station. The total value of the roadwork and land was an estimated \$7.1 million, an amount that exceeded the fair share program's requirement of at least \$4.9 million.

Residents living in communities along the golf course rallied in opposition to the fair share contract. They said the city shouldn't approve more development along Baymeadows Road until the current traffic woes are fixed by expanding the four-lane road to six lanes.

Neither the city nor the state Department of Transportation have any plans to widen that stretch of Baymeadows Road. Shopping centers, apartment complexes, and hotels line Baymeadows Road, leaving little room for more lanes without paying a hefty bill for right of way acquisition.

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