

Once-contested York County development finally to start, but on a smaller scale



The area marked in red shows where 55 acres will be cleared for new houses. The green area will be left undisturbed. Courtesy of Conserve York County Foundation

By [BEN SWENSON](#) | Correspondent

PUBLISHED: March 26, 2024 at 3:23 p.m. | UPDATED: March 26, 2024 at 4:41 p.m.

YORK — Heavy equipment will soon start rolling on the construction of a new development in upper York County near Lightfoot.

In late February, county officials issued final approval for site plans submitted by Fenton Mill Associates LLC for a 292-home community on a roughly 55-acre portion of 377 acres owned by the development firm. While the project will add nearly 300 homes in the county's rural District 1, local land use advocates are happy that the new neighborhood is a scaled-back version of the original plans.

D.R. Horton will be constructing Fenton Mill on land that is adjacent to York County's Fire Station 5 and the Skimino Hills neighborhood. Much of the property that will be developed is currently a dense forest, which will be removed before construction begins. Plans call for a 45-foot landscape buffer between Skimino Hills and Fenton Mill.

The primary entrance to Fenton Mill will be located on Newman Road beside the fire station with an alternate entrance on Barlow Road, according to site plans approved by York County officials.

The homes in the new community will be high-density, with most lots measuring between 0.161 and 0.3 acres. In addition to 292 homes, the development will include a pool, clubhouse, dog park, picnic shelter, disc golf course and several common recreation areas. It will be constructed in three phases.

Fenton Mill is a by-right development, meaning that those homes are allowed to be constructed under the properties' current zoning designation.

A by-right development does not need approval from the planning commission or board of supervisors, but must meet standard requirements for roads, stormwater management, emergency services and other elements of neighborhood design, according to Tom Chamberlain, a member of the York County Planning Commission and treasurer of the Conserve York County Foundation, which promotes responsible development in the mid- and northern reaches of the county.

RELATED ARTICLES

- **After controversy, York County's Fenton Mill housing development can proceed**
Clustering the homes on a small part of the larger properties accomplishes a couple goals, Chamberlain said. It allows a significant part of the land to remain undeveloped. While the homes will be built on roughly 55 acres, more than 300 acres will be preserved indefinitely.

Also, it's typically cheaper for the homebuilder to construct high-density homes because it saves money on costly standard features such as landscaping, roads and utilities.

Fenton Mill is a much smaller version of a development originally envisioned by Lamont Myers of Fenton Mill Associates. In September 2020, Myers submitted a rezoning application that would have allowed for 836 homes and 40,000 square feet of commercial space.

Some local residents balked at the plan, claiming that it was out of character with the rural landscape of the northern end of the county and would put too great a burden on local roads, schools and emergency services.

Myers returned with a more modest development proposal, eliminating 237 homes and the commercial space, but that effort also met with resistance. The county's board of supervisors rejected the rezoning application, the first time the body had denied such a request since 2000.

In early 2022, Fenton Mill Associates proceeded with the preliminary plans for the current development, with nearly 300 homes allowed by the Rural Residential and Limited Business zonings.

Steve Kennedy, vice president of the Conserve York County Foundation and a resident of District 1, said that the members of the organization are happy that much of the Fenton Mill tracts will be preserved.

Forest and farmland that many people feared would be cut down and paved over is now going to be an undisturbed 312-acre parcel, Kennedy said. “It’s a big win the way they remapped and redesigned the development to put the homes where they are now going to be.”

Earlier opposition to plans at Fenton Mill centered on the rezoning, not the homes allowed by-right, Chamberlain said. “As the landowner they have every right to put 292 homes on it,” he said. “We are not opposed to people’s right to develop property in a way that they are entitled to by zoning.”

Kennedy said that the scaled-back development is vindication for the those calling for more sensible development policies. “All we want is a fair playing field and to be heard — and not after the fact,” he said.

Ben Swenson, ben.swenson05@gmail.com