

BIRCHWOOD DEVELOPERS WIN ROUND THE EAST CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL APPROVES THE PROJECT AFTER DEVELOPERS AGREE TO PAY FOR ROADS AND WATER AND SEWER SERVICE.

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See microfilm for map.

A plan to build thousands of homes, a golf course, shopping centers and offices in rural Osceola County was approved by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council Wednesday.

Developers of Birchwood, planned for 4,800 homes on 10,000 acres along U.S. Highway 192 near Holopaw, won the approval after agreeing to pay for roads and water and sewer service.

The project still requires approval from the Osceola County Commission, expected to make a decision this month, and the state Department of Community Affairs.

Developer Maury Carter wants to build the 10,000-acre project in three phases over 20 to 30 years. It would include houses and apartments, two schools, a golf course and business center. Proposed recreational opportunities include boating and skiing.

The 15-square-mile area is about nine miles southeast of St. Cloud, with an eight-mile boundary running along U.S. Highway 192. Under the development plan, only the western 5,000 acres would be developed.

If the community is completed as planned, it would be twice as large as St. Cloud but would contain the same number of people. Birchwood could dramatically reshape the face of rural south Osceola County.

Wednesday's planning council approval followed weeks of back-and-forth efforts between Carter and planning council officials, who sought tougher restrictions for the development.

Last month, a council committee recommended rejection of the development, saying it was inconsistent with county growth plans, too far from urban areas and harmful to the environment. But the full council sent the plans back to its staff, asking it to identify conditions that would make the project acceptable.

On Wednesday, the council adopted its staff's recommendations for a road construction schedule. But it signed off on Carter's plans for 25-foot minimum buffers around wetlands, rather than the 50 feet sought by council staff.

Carter said he was pleased with the approval.

"It's good to get it behind us," Carter said. "We've got a few more hurdles to go, and then hopefully we can get started on this project. There was a lot of give and take, and we tried to be reasonable."

[Illustration]

MAP: Proposed Birchwood development. SENTINEL GRAPHIC.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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