

Lake Hart: Houses or pastures?

By Will Wellons

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Will the oak hammock along Orange County's Lake Hart, now home to deer and cattle, be the next place where developers sell lakefront lots?

County commissioners must decide Tuesday as they consider approving 1,137 acres of ranch land near Orlando International Airport for development.

Located between the airport and the planned international headquarters for Campus Crusade for Christ, Lake Hart is a "natural" site to provide homes and shops to booming southeast Orange County, said the project's manager, Daryl Carter.

In addition, the GreeneWay, the beltway around Orlando, slices through the property.

Carter wants approval to build 5,149 homes and apartments, plus shops, a business park and a hotel. The Lake Hart site also includes more than 1,000 acres of conservation land that will be off limits to construction.

But the proposed development is outside the urban area where the county allows intense city-style growth and provides water and sewer services.

To approve Lake Hart, the county will have to expand its urban service area and change its growth plan, which determines where urban growth can occur.

Orange officials say they are willing to make those exceptions because the Lake Hart project includes a major employer in Campus Crusade, an interdenominational ministry with 44,000 staff members and volunteers in 152 countries. Crusade agreed to move its headquarters to Central Florida from California in 1989 and bring more than 850 jobs.

But the county says it will not allow any development until the first portion of Crusade's headquarters is complete — and the timetable for that is uncertain.

"The link is vital," County Chairman Linda Chapin said. "We have no reason to expand without the major employer."

Attorneys for the landowners aren't happy with the county's condition and say they may try to get the land annexed into the city of Orlando.

"We are being asked to forgo development rights until events occur that are out of our control," attorney Duke Woodson said.

The developers have talked about annexation with city officials and Orlando Chief Administrative Officer Bob Haven said the city is interested.

Caught in the middle of Tuesday's vote is Campus Crusade. The ministry wants to begin raising \$30 million to build a 300,000-square-foot complex on the shores of Lake Hart. But it won't start until the development is approved.

Campus Crusade has temporary headquarters on Sand Lake Road.

"We have been waiting four years," said Leroy Eger, a board member with the ministry. "We would not have moved here without Lake Hart to look forward to."

Public reaction to the development is mixed. Some residents don't like the idea of continued growth in southeast Orange. Others say they need more shops, roads and other services near the airport.

Bob Beaty, who has lived on nearby Lake Whippoorwill for 11 years, said he realizes that with the beltway comes more urban growth. But "I'm very anti-development," he said. "The expressway has come through. It is not going to remain pastureland. I hope it can as long as possible."

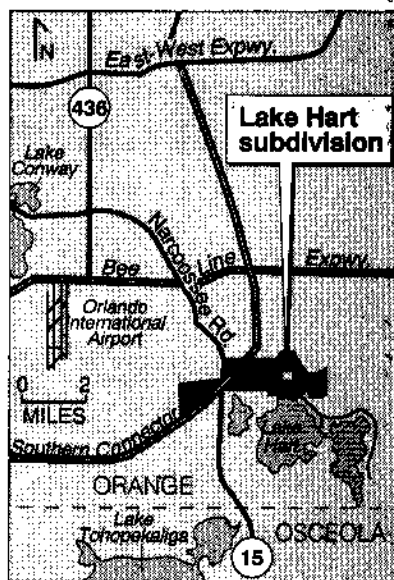
Others, like Max Hunt, who would live across from the development, yearn for the day when they won't have to make an 11-mile round trip to the grocery store.

"This is everything that should be done in Orange County," Hunt said. Without Lake Hart, airport workers will live in Osceola County, he said.

"We need to control growth, not have it leapfrogging to other counties," he said.

Orange County Commissioner Fran Pignone, who represents the area, said she is inclined to support the project because it is near the airport, and she doesn't want to lose the land to Orlando.

"If the urban area is going to expand, it makes more sense for it to be near the airport," she said.



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