

Raleigh tract in new hands

Country club's plans uncertain

BY JANELL ROSS
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RALEIGH – The trouble over the Watson property ended with what was essentially an 11th-hour handshake deal.

The property at New Bern Avenue and Peartree Lane in east Raleigh is covered in trees so tall that passers-by have to look hard for the Watson family's decades-old white colonial. Nearby are a collection of racially and economically diverse neighborhoods in an area sometimes referred to as King Charles.

Since 2003, community members have been working to create guidelines to protect King Charles from the type of development that they believe has harmed other communities. Then, the Watson property went up for sale.

In 2004, James A. Bailey Sr. and his son Wayne Bailey bought the land. They announced plans for a commercial strip and townhouses that would cost about \$70,000. It was just the sort of project that some residents thought would transform King Charles into a troubled community, or at least ruin its appeal.

By this summer, some of King Charles' residents were anxious, if not angry.

On Aug. 9, Wayne Bailey and area residents gathered at the Lion's Park community center. In the middle of what became a contentious meeting, John McConnell made Bailey an offer. McConnell was there because he bought the nearby Raleigh Country Club in late 2003.

"Let me ask you a question," McConnell said to Bailey. "How much did you pay for the Watson site?"

Bailey and his father paid \$675,000.

"I'll give you \$700,000 right now, if you'll walk away," McConnell said. "You can get out now, wash your hands of this whole thing."

Bailey looked shocked. For a heartbeat, area residents who went ready to wage verbal war sat silent.

When the meeting ended, McConnell and Bailey convened in the parking lot. After a little

talking and a handshake, the deal was essentially done, McConnell said. The actual sale was recorded Aug. 31. McConnell paid the Baileys \$700,000 for all 7.62 acres of the Watson property.

"It was just one of those emotional decisions," McConnell said. "The last thing I want to see happen in that section of New Bern Avenue is watch it become another Mini City [a Capital Boulevard area]."

Right now, King Charles includes enclaves of large lots and stately brick houses. Others feature smaller yards and more modest homes. A few apartment complexes have cropped up in recent years. There are also some sections in the early stages of dilapidation.

But King Charles is inside the Beltline, less than 15 minutes from downtown. It has the kind of mature trees that don't come with a house in a new subdivision. And the Raleigh Country Club features the last golf course designed by Donald Ross, who also designed Pinehurst's No. 2.

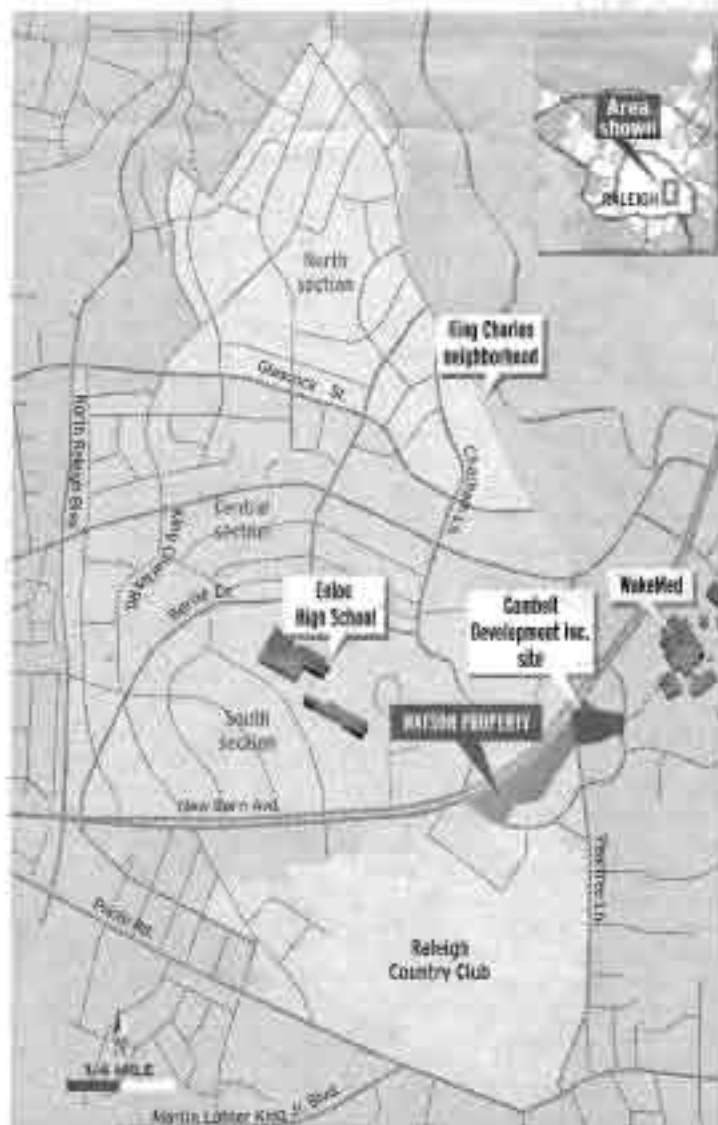
A plan to guide growth

In 2003, community leaders were nervous. They feared that the development patterns that characterize sections of the city — unattractive affordable housing and a glut of strip shopping centers — would consume the green section of New Bern Avenue closest to their homes. With the help of city staff, residents drafted a set of guidelines that make some types of development unlikely, said Matthew Leary, who leads a task force that worked on the plan.

The King Charles plan includes streets lined by about 1,700 homes, city documents show. When combined with zoning that gives the plan teeth, King Charles became one of about 14 Raleigh communities inside a neighborhood conservation overlay district. The King Charles district calls for homes on lots no smaller than .77 acres in the southern section and no smaller than .29 in the rest.

About the time King Charles residents began collecting signatures to require those larger lots, the Baileys bought the Watson property.

Some area landowners supported the Baileys' plans. Three homeowners closest to the Watson property wanted to sell to the Baileys. But most of King Charles'



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IF YOU GO

WHAT: East Citizen's Advisory Council meeting. Campbell Development Inc. will present its plans for commercial development across the street from the Watson property, on the northwest side of Pear Tree Lane and New Bern Avenue. Immediately afterward, a King Charles neighborhood plan task force meeting will convene. The neighborhood conservation overlay district and the recently purchased Watson property will be discussed.

WHEN: 7 p.m. today

WHERE: Lion's Park community center, Raleigh

property owners objected. Hundreds signed a petition for zoning changes that would prohibit the townhouses called for in the Baileys' plan. Signatures came with such speed that the zoning change was approved before the Baileys' plan.

The community's swift action forced Wayne Bailey to take his ideas to the community. That's how Bailey wound up shaking McConnell's hand.

"I think the general consensus in the neighborhood is what happened was kind of a good thing," Leary said. "They've [the Raleigh Country Club] got skin in the game. So, they have a continuing interest in what happens to this

community."

McConnell hasn't committed any plans for the land to paper yet. He is considering building more expensive townhouses or condos or expanding the country club. McConnell has asked the task force to consider removing the Watson property from the neighborhood conservation overlay district.

Tonight, the community will have the chance to learn more about McConnell's request and a second commercial development proposal.

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