



# Charles County Planning Commission

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## Planning Commission Report to the County Commissioners

### Master Plan and Docket 90 Amendment, PDZA #24-90(23)

#### St. Charles Villages of Wooded Glen and Piney Reach

##### Summary:

The applicant, St. Charles Community, LLC, is requesting an amendment, known as PDZA #24-90(23), to the approved Master Plan for the Villages of Wooded Glen and Piney Reach within the St. Charles PUD (Planned Unit Development) Zone. In coordination with the Board of Education, St. Charles Community, LLC is proposing to relocate the site for a proposed middle school from the Village of Wooded Glen Neighborhood 3 (Highlands Neighborhood), located along St. Charles Parkway, to the Village of Piney Reach Neighborhood 2, located along Piney Church Road. In addition, St. Charles Community, LLC is requesting an exception to the “85% rule” which currently requires that no residential construction of any kind shall begin in the Village of Piney Reach until 85% of all residential construction has been completed in the Village of Wooded Glen. The exception would be to allow the development of the residential Village of Piney Reach Neighborhood 3 prior to 85% of the residential development being completed in the Village of Wooded Glen. Finally, amendments are being proposed to prior remediation requirements for the vegetated buffer along MD Route 488 to allow for natural regeneration to be used in areas within the 150-foot buffer where it has been over five (5) years since timber harvest activities have occurred. Other refinements and updates are being provided to the Master Plan as described in the staff report to the Planning Commission dated April 1, 2024.

##### Public Hearing:

The Charles County Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on April 1, 2024 for the proposed Villages of Wooded Glen and Piney Reach Master Plan and Docket 90 Amendment, PDZA #24-90(23). Five (5) sets of written public comments were submitted to the Planning Commission prior to the hearing and were uploaded to the Planning Commission’s meeting agenda for April 1, 2024. At the April 1st hearing, staff gave an overview of the amendment being requested by the Applicant, St. Charles Community, LLC. The Applicant then presented their request in further detail and responded to inquiries from the Planning Commission.

There were eight (8) registered public speakers who provided testimony during the hearing. Public testimony referred to concerns with the newly proposed location and timing of construction of the middle school, exceptions to the “85% rule”, underutilization of new Piney Church Road, revisions to the buffer remediation plan for MD 488, and notification. Concerns were also expressed with construction issues related to existing individual homes and infrastructure within the development. Testimony was provided by Charles County Public Schools in support of the proposed middle school location. The applicant offered clarifications in response to public comments. After ensuing discussion, the Planning Commission voted to hold the record open for 15 days, until 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 17, 2024.

During the open record, seven (7) public comments were received. Five (5) comments, one of which included an attached petition, expressed opposition to the proposal. A comment from Charles County Public Schools expressed support of the proposed location for a new middle school on new Piney Church Road. The Applicant provided a submittal reiterating their request and further responding to issues raised at the April 1st Public Hearing. All comments were uploaded on April 19, 2024 to the Planning Commission's meeting agenda for May 6, 2024.

The applicant also proposed that General Note 14, which includes reference to the Buffer Remediation Plan for MD Route 488, revert to its original state as shown on the approved Master Plan currently uploaded to the Planning Commission's April 1st agenda, and be amended to include the statement "Natural regeneration may be used in areas within the 150-ft buffer where it has been over 5-years since timbering harvest activities have occurred."

### **Work Session:**

On May 6, 2024, the Planning Commission held a Work Session to discuss the subject application. The Planning Commission received additional information from Charles County Public Schools staff regarding the logistics of new school construction and the need to plan ahead to have the necessary approvals in place to secure state funding when needed. The Planning Commission also received information from the applicant clarifying that the pending middle school site is not affected by the request for an exemption to the 85% rule for the Village of Wooded Glen Neighborhood 3, and vice versa.

### **Recommendation:**

On May 6, 2024, after the conclusion of the Work Session, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to forward a recommendation of approval for two (2) of the three (3) amendments proposed as part of PDZA #24-90(23), St. Charles Villages of Wooded Glen and Piney Reach. The Planning Commission is recommending approval of the relocation of the middle school site and the amendment to the Buffer Remediation Plan for MD Route 488. The Planning Commission is not recommending approval for the waiver of the 85% rule. Factors considered in reaching the decision were as follows:

- The detailed analysis provided in the Staff Report.
- In support of the school relocation amendment:
  - The site does not accommodate two schools at the same location based on State standards. The logistics involved procuring and managing transportation for two schools at the same location with differing start times.
  - Need for Charles County Public Schools to retain another school site.
- In opposition to '85% rule' amendment:
  - Multiple public comments opposing the concept of allowing one development to remain incomplete while starting construction on the next.