

Lake James

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under questioning, noted that, "There is no schedule (for development), there is no hurry. The schedule that everyone is scared of doesn't exist. The market dictates how quickly that product sells."

He said his company "has quite a bit of experience at Lake James and at other lakes" in the development arena.

"For anyone going to Lake Norman, there is an example of their experience," said a man in the audience.

"There have been some mistakes, I'll admit that, but as with anything you learn as you go and improve," Schrener said.

Commissioner Campbell said, "If I had a choice to ask Mr. Schrener to move out of town and not develop at the lake, it would make me happy. But that land belongs to Crescent. I think Crescent will make every effort to keep that lake clean."

He added, "I think our role as commissioners is to try to preserve as much of the lake as we can."

Braun, who started the current conservation effort by forming the group Citizens To Save Lake James, said development would diminish water quality and impact the Catawba River in other counties as well.

"There's no way that lake can be developed the way it's planned and not degrade the water," he said.

He called the Catawba River "the Nile of North Carolina," a valuable water source serving tens of thousands of people.

Ervin, a longtime resident of the Lake James community on N.C. Highway 126, worried the black community would be pushed out by the influx of wealthy newcomers.

"In the next five to 10 years nobody will be able to do anything but ride down the center of that lake," Ervin said. "They've done more development in three years than I've seen in 55 years of living

on the lake. There's just so many things that are changing our lives."

Simpson said the county was doing what it could to protect the impoundment by restricting lake-side development that is not served by public sewer. He also cited buffering requirements and other land-use rules designed to protect water quality.

"We're hopeful that within this generation the whole lake can be sewered," he said. "That's one problem we can address. We can at least get it to the Burke County line. We're hopeful that McDowell will also see the benefits of laying sewer lines, as well."

But he added, "We can do things to protect the shoreline, but for the rivers running into the lake there's very little we can do."

Responding to a question about enforcement of rules requiring natural buffers, Simpson said, "We do have enforcement procedures in place. There are criminal charges and fines that can be levied. It's just a matter of being able to catch them."

Bob Brown stressed that enforcement of land-use rules would have to come from local governments.

"Things need to be done locally," he said, noting that he had a concern that removal of trees along the shoreline would impact fish populations. He also said a sewer system would help protect the lake.

"County commissioners need to be complimented for pushing a sewer system," Brown said.

New lake resident Henderson said he had lived in big cities all over the country, but had found a home on Lake James.

"We've been looking for a place like Lake James for a long time," he said. "We had this picture in our minds for years. We're so delighted to be down here. We feel very privileged to be on such a beautiful lake. I would hope for my own selfish interest that the development taking place would be done with a

very strong sense of community involvement."

Officials also discussed the positive aspects of development.

"The more homes that are built up there, the more tax base we have," said Campbell.

But Simpson said conservation should be considered.

"When it comes right down to it, the only way we can ensure that property isn't developed is to buy it. That is the only permanent solution," he said.

Responding to a question about whether Crescent would be open to offers from conservation groups, Schrener said, "We've always had a company policy of working cooperatively with an entity that may be interested in purchasing land at a fair market price."

Students in attendance said the forum was an interesting learning experience.

"I didn't have a clear understanding of the issues, but I learned a lot about the environment and the economic aspects of development," said Sarah Robinson of Morganton.

Student Anthony Pack of Morganton said officials should closely monitor development.

"If Lake James develops too fast, it's going to pollute the rest of the counties," he said.

Cyndie Callaway, the college's vice president for institutional advancement, said the forum offered a good opportunity for key officials and environmentalists to meet each other and find common ground.

"From what we heard tonight, this is the first time these people have all come together at the same table to have any dialogue," said Callaway. "We're glad at the college to have played a role in that."

Noted Simpson, "It helps people to see what each other looks like, to see that the Crescent representative isn't a dragon with horns and the environmentalist isn't off the deep end."