

PHOTO BY PETER WHITE

The brilliant white trunks of the mighty sycamore stand out in the landscape.

FLORA
FROM PAGE 1

Another theory is that some vines tend to grow toward the dark. This sounds logical since many tree trunks are rough and dark and provide helpful vertical avenues for climbing toward necessary sunlight.

The brilliant white upper trunks of the sycamore discourage the advance of such vines that would compete for the available sunlight. Other theories abound.

In the presence of a sycamore, I like to reflect on the rich heritage of these trees as described by our pioneering forbears.

Descriptions of specimens of unbelievable proportions depict trees that, though hollow inside, were vigorous, a characteristic of the sycamore. In the 1700s, when the Morgan family arrived to establish their homestead along Morgan Creek (present-day inley Golf Course and Mason arm Biological Reserve), they set up a household inside an old sycamore tree while they worked for months to build a proper farmhouse. There are descriptions of trees large enough to provide temporary shelter for a dozen soldiers on horseback.

Other sycamore stories describe the wildlife value and the use of the hard center cores of the sycamore ball seed heads as buttons on Native American and pioneer clothing, and on and on...

I suspect some of you also have stories, and I hope you share by feeling for sycamore as a favorite tree, such that when I see one it's like seeing a good friend whose mere presence brings cheer.

CROSSROADS
FROM PAGE 1

discussion. But after months discussing ideas, values and how previous plans played out on the ground, the committee could not reach a consensus over how to proceed, and at its December meeting a majority of its members voted to send a compromise plan, along with the work that went into it, to the board of aldermen for review. The board is expected to look over the ideas at its retreat later this month.

While there was disagreement as to how to proceed, there was broad consensus that previous attempts to attract mixed-use development had fallen flat.

"The floating zones never landed," Amy Jeroloman, a committee member and an 18-year resident of the area, said referring to the town's strategy, which encouraged mixed use but didn't set specific sites allowing commercial spaces to "float" to where they made sense.

Jeroloman was one of three members of the committee who offered a compromise between members who wanted to see more extensive changes and those who didn't.

She said with the moratorium past, and landowners and developers anxious for guidance so they can proceed on projects, the committee wanted to get some feedback from the board of aldermen.

One key sticking point with the committee was what to do about development on the west side of Old N.C. 86. Jeroloman said there was general

agreement about how to plan for the east side of the road, which is currently served by water and sewer, but there was a strong effort to limit growth to the west.

Mayor Mark Chilton, a member of the committee, said he was among those advocating to keep the area west of Old 86 as is. Given that the area does not have utilities now, it makes sense, he said "to preserve options for the future" and concentrate on areas already marked for development and served by utilities.

Chilton said the committee did agree on three areas for mixed use, a site on Homestead Road across from Lake Hogan Farms Road, an area on the corner of Eubanks Road and Old 86 and a small area on the east side of the new Twin Creeks Park.

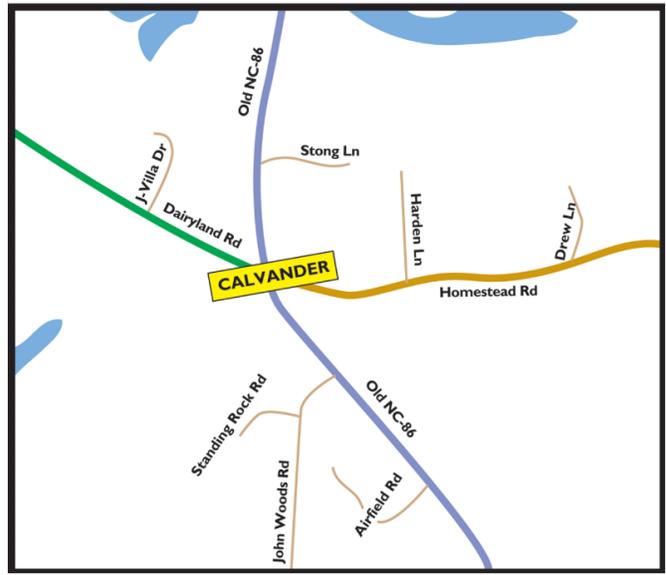
Planning board chair James Carnahan said he was one of the committee members who disagreed with the approach of just

naming a few sites. He advocated allowing for small mixed use to happen in areas along the main transit corridors with the intent to create a New Urban feel.

Carnahan said there are no large parcels in the area to fashion another Southern Village or Meadowmont with homes around a large commercial center and it would be better to encourage small mixed-use projects to fill in along the transit corridors.

"That way it's more flexible and not dependent on a couple of large developments that we probably won't see coming along for another five or six years."

Chilton said once the board of aldermen reviews the committee's work, the board will discuss how to proceed with the report and whether to send it back to the committee or ask the town planning staff to review it and begin work on drafting new development rules for the area.



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