

Development to boost Beach population

Sunday, August 12 (By Ed Offley News Herald Writer)

PANAMA CITY BEACH

Without fanfare or ceremony, the St. Joe Company has initiated the largest mixed-use residential community in city history that, upon completion in 2018, will boost the current full-time population by 65 percent.

The Jacksonville-based land development company on July 20 quietly submitted a formal development application to the city for the Breakfast Point community, which will be built on a 1,414-acre tract of land north of Back Beach Road, between Alf Coleman Road on the west and Wildwood Road on the east. All but 247 acres of the site are in unincorporated Bay County, so the project includes a request for annexation and rezoning by the city of the other 1,167 acres.

As planned, Breakfast Point upon “buildout” in 2018 will have a mix of 1,550 single-family homes and 1,550 multifamily units, as well as 335,000 square feet of office space and 300,000 square feet of retail space. The development document indicates the company will release land for development of 141 singlefamily homes and 141 multifamily units each year until the project is complete.

Other features will include a 200-bed assisted-living facility, a 125-room hotel, and a number of civic uses such as a church or library branch. An unspecified number of other facilities, such as restaurants, fitness centers and community swimming pools, are anticipated.

The company’s request for approval of the mixed-use community shows that when fully developed, Breakfast Point will have a year-round population of 6,555 residents — a 65-percent increase over the current city population of 10,005 — and a seasonal population of 1,090. This includes a school-age population of 1,088 children in grades K-12. The Bay County School Board earlier this year began constructing the \$29.7 million Breakfast Point Academy, a K-8 school located within the development site on land St. Joe donated to the district.

Commercial activities at the site will employ 1,673 people, including 560 in retail, 857 in offices, 56 in the planned hotel and 200 in the planned assisted-living facility, the application states.

A company spokesman said Breakfast Point will be renowned for the amount of open space, hiking trails and other natural features that will remain intact.

“This is going to be a very green community, strongly connected to the region,” St. Joe Vice President Jerry Ray said Friday. “It is a community in a natural setting, nature-based living with this extensive trail system we will build.”

The company already has announced that it plans to retain more than 4,000 acres lying north of the site in a natural conservation district and will extend the trail system from the community north to the West Bay shoreline, where an Audubon Society Nature Center already is under development.

About 424 acres — nearly one-third of the tract — will remain undeveloped, Ray said. “This is a place for people to live and raise their children,” Ray said.

Under state law, construction projects exceeding 1,000 units must obtain local, regional and state approval as a “Development of Regional Impact,” or DRI. In submitting its application to Panama City Beach, the company has begun a bureaucratic trek through multiple government agencies that could take anywhere from one to two years before it wins final approval, said city Planning Director Mel Leonard.

Breakfast Point is the third — and by far largest — DRI project the city has considered, Leonard said.

“Only Seahaven and Pier Park were found to have a regional impact, and this is bigger than

either of them,” Leonard added. Seahaven plans to develop 2,952 units, albeit on a much smaller, 52-acre site along Front Beach Road.

Among the agencies that will review and assess the planned community are the West Florida Regional Planning Council, the state Department of Community Affairs, state Departments of Transportation and Environmental Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Final approval will come from the City Council after the application passes through the other agencies for review.

However, St. Joe already has received permission from the city to begin developing a 180-lot subdivision on part of the 247-acre parcel that is located in the city. Under the DRI regulations, a developer may begin actual work as long as it does not pass the 1,000-unit threshold before all of the approvals and hearings are complete.

Ray said his company’s economists and planners assess that, despite cooling real estate market conditions elsewhere in the state and nation, there will be no shortage of families wanting to build and live in the new community.

“The market will tell us what to do,” Ray said. “Right today, what we think is going to happen is that there will be demand aplenty.”