

## **High Springs Subdivision Development Project “Bridlewood” Explained: The context and the controversy**

### **What’s going on?**

Bridlewood is a large-scale development project in High Springs, Alachua County, located in the southern sector of the city east of US Highway 41.

The development occupies just over 686 acres of land and is planned to offer 2,000 units of both single-family and multi-family lots that could be villas or smaller home sites.

According to High Springs’ Public Information Officer, Kevin Mangan, this is the biggest development the small town has seen yet.

The development will also feature future private schools and community spaces like parks, trails and a clubhouse, besides just residences.

The project was first approved in a High Springs City Commission Meeting back in October, 2022. The agreement was reached with Bridlewood of High Springs, LLC, the company behind the project. The plan was approved in a 4-1 vote; Katherine Weitz was the only commissioner to vote against the project.

According to the meeting minutes, her main concern was promising Bridlewood capacity in their new sewer system.

A sewer plant can only take a certain amount of gallons per day and every new house that is connected to that plant, adds more gallons per day. By reserving capacity for Bridlewood, the city is essentially promising to prioritize that Bridlewood property has space and is first in line for sewer hookups.

Weitz was concerned that “reserving capacity” seemed like preferential treatment to Bridlewood and limited the city’s flexibility if another project may need sewer capacity.

Weitz also voiced concerns about environmental impacts citing High Springs’ unique landscape including the quality of sinkholes, rivers and springs.

Chris Potts, the engineer behind the project said the project will involve multiple builders.

To which Potts responded that state permitting requires the developers and builders to address these environmental issues and run them through the requirements of agencies like the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife.

### **What's the controversy?**

However, like Weitz, not everybody is on board with this development. Many High Springs residents are concerned about losing the small town charm that a project of this scale jeopardizes.

2,000 new homes means thousands of new residents creating trickle-down consequences to think about.

The community is concerned about the strain on resources a population boom might pose. For example, traffic, schools, infrastructure like fire rescue, etc.

The developers solution, a Community Development District (CDD), was not approved by the City Commission in a meeting held in February, 2025.

This idea makes Bridlewood a special tax district that the developer uses to pay for public infrastructure like sidewalks and roads. When a homeowner purchases a property within the district, in this case Bridlewood, they are charged that loan on their property tax every year.

This differs from a Homeowners Association that is a private organization run by residents because the CDD is public, meaning they have open meetings and a public board.

However, this proposal was ultimately not accepted because it means Bridlewood buyers would pay property taxes, HOA dues, if they apply, and additional CDD taxes.

In the meeting minutes, Weitz also pushed back. She was concerned about “pricing out citizens.”

“A CDD allows the developer to seek loans at an especially lower interest rate, which is a benefit to them,” said Mangan. However, he understands those fees can be expensive for Bridlewood residents.

Mangan said impact fees should cover the costs of ramping up public infrastructure to the Bridlewood project demands.

These are one-time charges the builders pay to the city when starting new projects to help fund the expansion of public infrastructure to keep up with new buildings.

Some High Springs locals aren't quite as opposed to the change.

"I believe we have to grow," said Jody Huey, a resident of High Springs for 12 years and a small business owner in Downtown High Springs. "If a town doesn't grow, it dies." He understands that change is inevitable and beneficial for the long-term growth of the town.

"It just needs to be controlled," he said. He still thinks development should be cautious of the town

One social media post caught fire throughout the community denouncing the project.

The post by Beyond Florida warns "10 years from now, the land you see here will have vanished beneath car washes, fast food restaurants, and gas stations."

Many residents have grown even more cautious of the development after the circulation of this video, originally posted in May.

### **Updates since inception**

So far, Mangan said the first phase of the building has been accepted. Phase 1A features the first 106 homes built in the Bridlewood project. This is just the first chunk of homes and development that are actually being built and sold actively.

The Bridlewood company shows specific house models within this phase that are up for sale. According to their website, starting values for the homes go from \$450,000 up to \$760,000 in price.