

# Elkton Council Supports Wellness Park

By **NOLAN STOUT**  
*Daily News-Record*

**ELKTON** — Despite reservations, Elkton officials are throwing their support behind a proposed wellness facility.

The proposed Shenandoah Wellness Park would be part of a massive undertaking with four facilities on hundreds of acres called the Blue Ridge Project led by developer Pham Chopra.

While it was clear officials had many questions about the project at Monday's Town Council meeting, the panel voted 4-1 to support the project.

Council members Margaretta Isom, Jeff Jones, Harry Armbruster and Steve America voted to support the development, while Councilman Josh Gooden voted against it. Councilman Jay Dean was absent.

Mayor Wayne Printz said the town's support was needed so Chopra could seek funding for the project.

Chopra, who did not attend Monday's council meeting, released plans for the park in the fall. The project would be built on several parcels he owns along Elkton's north, east and southeast town limits and just outside the southeastern town limits in Rockingham County.

An article in *The Valley Banner* in December quoted Chopra saying the final project "will encompass just over 700 acres." However, the properties he owns designated in a master plan amount to around 460 acres.

The project remains short on details and no attempt has been made publicly to slap a price tag on the proposal. Chopra could not be reached for comment Monday.

Richard Hine of The Hine Group, which is assisting on the project, did not return a call for comment Monday.

Chopra has said previously that he wants to start working on the park this fall.

According to the master plan, the project includes The Shalimar residential development north of downtown; Athletic Village along the eastern town limits; Shenandoah Wellness Village along the

southeastern town limits; and the Shenandoah Hospitality Village in Rockingham County outside Elkton's southeastern town limits.

The Shenandoah Wellness Park includes the Wellness, Athletic and Hospitality villages, while The Shalimar is part of the larger project.

The master plan indicates part of the inspiration for the park comes from a desire to treat veterans and former professional athletes, specifically former NFL players.

Chopra, a native of India, operated a substance abuse rehabilitation center in Keezletown for two years in the 1990s. He has said it shut down for financial reasons.

The project calls for the separate villages to be connected by a greenway, which also would connect to downtown Elkton. The town has been discussing a greenway since early 2016.

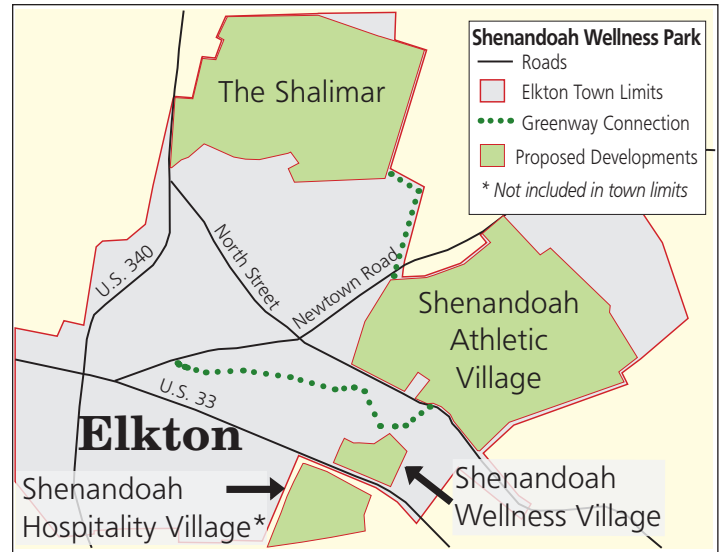
The Wellness Village would provide physical, emotional and psychological therapy offices, according to Chopra's master plan. It is proposed for property adjacent to Elkton Middle School and includes an area for college students to work, a veterans center, aquatic therapy, spiritual center and therapeutic gardens.

The ambitious master plan for the Athletic Village includes 12 multiuse fields, three tracks, a large facility with an indoor track, football field and basketball and volleyball courts, indoor and outdoor shooting ranges, an archery range and a ropes course. The plan also calls for a dining facility, cabins and a cafe.

The master plan says it will "focus on youth athletics and provide an unsurpassed venue for tournaments, camps, combines and training."

The Hospitality Village is just as ambitious. It calls for a 200-room hotel with conference rooms, lecture halls and classrooms; a 4,000-seat outdoor amphitheater, shops and restaurants. It also calls for a pedestrian bridge over U.S. 33 to the Wellness Village.

The Hospitality Village could be the trickiest portion of the project. It is situated on around 45 acres in Rockingham County at the in-



tersection of U.S. 33 and Summit Avenue across from Elkton Middle School.

While the town has discussed a boundary line adjustment with the county to bring that area into Elkton, nothing has been finalized. If the property remains in the county, it would require a rezoning from the Board of Supervisors and the master plan would need to be approved by county staff.

The focus of the park is on The Wellness, Athletic and Hospitality villages and little information has been released about The Shalimar. A master plan online indicates it would include 202 units.

Printz acknowledged "there's plenty of concerns" about the project, but supporting it was better than losing it.

"It would be better off to take a shot at, than for a possible walk away because we don't show support," he said.

While it's unclear if Chopra has considered other sites for the project, he received a letter of support from Shenandoah in Page County, according to the project's website.

After the meeting, Printz said he doesn't have "as many concerns as some others."

"I think that we need to embrace this opportunity and if there's an issue that comes up we have to work with the people involved to try and solve the issue," he said.

Printz said the town still must approve site plans and possible rezonings for the project.

Gooden, in explaining his "no" vote, said the project still has a long way to go.

"I think it's too early, mostly, to start pledging your full support for a project that you don't really have all the details for," he said.

But Jones is confident Chopra would address any concerns from town officials and residents.

"All that will be addressed and I have full confidence in Pham's group not to put us in awkward positions or unsafe situations," he said.

Council approved a resolution of support for the Blue Ridge Project on Monday, but didn't vote on a letter of support for the Shenandoah Wellness Park.

Printz introduced the letter and Isom made a motion to approve it, which was seconded by Armbruster.

Before the vote was taken, however, a resident asked if council had concerns about the development. After Printz answered the question, he instructed Isom to read a resolution of support, which was approved on a 4-1 vote.

After the meeting, Printz said the letter and resolution were voted on separately. The discrepancy could not be explained Monday night and council members weren't sure if the letter was actually approved.

Printz said if a vote wasn't taken, it wouldn't need to be brought before council again.

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