LAFAYETTE — A descendant of a family buried in a private plot south of Lafayette says parts of Frenchman’s Creek Subdivision have been built on a 117-year-old cemetery with as many as 500 graves.

A California developer wants to add to the subdivision, but the Lafayette Areawide Planning Commission has balked at approval until it learns more about the boundaries of the cemetery, planning commission development manager Sidney Fontenot said Wednesday.

Jeffery Abshire of Lafayette said that all he wants to do is protect the one family plot still visible at the site.

His grandmother and two aunts are among ancestors buried in an inconspicuous plot on the edge of a small forest in Frenchman’s Creek Subdivision.

The subdivision is off Robley Drive near the Vermilion Parish border and contains large, upscale homes.

A back yard of one of the homes is within 50 feet of the four iron crosses marking the graves.

Abshire said his father remembers 500 graves on the site.

“I can’t do anything for all the other people, but I want to make sure nothing happens to our plot,” said Abshire, a retired parish government employee.

“That land was given so that the people buried there could rest in peace, not so houses could be built on them.”

The developer is Jim Smith of El Segundo, Calif. Attempts to reach him were unsuccessful.

However, his attorney in Lafayette, Robert Vigerie Jr., and his engineering consultant, Randall Hebert, both said Smith has no intention of disturbing the Abshire plot.

The developer’s proposal to LAPC is to omit the Abshire family plot from the subdivision, surround it with a fence and build an access to it for the Abshires, Hebert said.

He said that when the first phase of Frenchman’s Creek was developed in the 1980s, advertisements ran in the Lafayette newspaper and a billboard was put up to inform the public about the development.

Smith offered to pay for moving the bodies to the cemetery or mausoleum of the survivors’ choice, Hebert said.

One family moved the remains out of a plot located about 40 feet north of the Abshire plot, he said.

Two iron crosses and a dilapidated tomb remain at that plot, which has been overgrown with weeds. Fontenot said he is not aware of any other graves.

Abshire said his father, 78-year-old Walter Abshire, will decide what proposals to accept or reject.

“He (Walter Abshire) remembers how he and his brother dug a hole for one of the graves,” Jeffery Abshire said.

Also, Walter Abshire remembers that there were hundreds of other graves, some located where many of the houses were built in the 1980s, Jeffery Abshire said.

He said that his father told him that many of the graves were for children and babies who died at birth.

Jeffery Abshire said he also remembers the crosses and said he has seen human bones on the site.

Fontenot said a major problem is that there is little documentation about the cemetery in the Lafayette Parish clerk of court’s records.

That is because it was not uncommon for private cemeteries to be developed by families in the 19th century, he said.

A land transaction shows that on June 10, 1877, two people with the surnames Simon and Hebert dedicated a little over two acres, or 3½ arpents, for use as a private cemetery for their descendants.