



Proposed annexation could help La Center meet housing goals

The 50-acre property could help La Center meet its goal of increasing the number of multi-family units within the city

KELLY MOYER
Staff reporter

LA CENTER - Annexing a 50 acres zoned for townhomes, apartments and other medium-density residential units into the city of La Center's urban growth area could help that city move closer toward its goal of having a much higher percentage of multi-family housing.

City councilors approved the first steps of the annexation at their Feb. 10 meeting, after hearing presentations from the city's planning consultant, Eric Eisenmann, the property owner, Randy Goode, and one of Goode's neighbors from the nearby single-family housing development known as East Fork Estates.

"At this stage, all that is happening is annexation," Eisenmann explained. "There is no develop-

ment proposal. That comes later and will be vetted through the hearings process."

Although a small portion is zoned for single-family residences, the vast majority of the property, which sits to the west of La Center's urban boundary, is zoned for medium-density residential and allows for attached single-family homes and multi-family residences such as townhomes or small apartment complexes. Under the medium-density designation, multi-family developments must have eight to 16 units per acre.

La Center leaders hope to increase the number of multi-family residences available in the city to meet a state requirement for a 75-25 mix - with 75 percent of the city's housing areas designated as low-density residential and 25 percent listed as medium-density residential. Currently, La Center has less than 2 percent of its residential lands zoned for multi-family homes.

Randy Goode, the property owner seeking annexation into the city, said he understands and supports the city's goals for developing more multi-family

homes, even if it wasn't what he had originally dreamed of developing on his 50-acre parcel.

"Medium density is not necessarily my first choice for what I would have wanted on my property," Goode said. "But I do respect that there is a need for medium density in the city ... and I know that some people can afford \$300,000 homes, others can afford \$200,000 and some can rent and all are important, so I think it is important for the city to have more than one designation to meet the needs of more than one demographic."

Although he had looked into a "zone swap," in which he could have changed his property's zoning designation if another property owner was willing to take on the medium-density residential zone, Goode said that the deadline for such a swap had passed and that he was now "ready to move forward" with keeping the property's original medium-density zoning.

Goode added that, with the planned casino-hotel resort on the nearby Cowlitz Indian Reservation, he suspected that La Center would soon be in-

demanded for people moving into the area to live and work at the casino and resort.

"There will be a lot of jobs and a demand for housing," Goode said.

The statement is backed up with numbers. In late January, Eisenmann told the city council that, despite a decrease in population projections - thanks to the 2008 recession - La Center is still projected to double in size over the next 30 years, jumping from its current 3,100 residents to more than 7,900. And, with the increased population, the city will need to add nearly 1,500 new housing units.

Goode added that he was working with his neighbors in East Fork Estates, who have voiced concern over any future development's impact on their quiet, single-family lots. One East Fork Estates neighbor present at the Feb. 10 council meeting said he and his wife had recently moved from the Seattle area to their home in La Center to escape the traffic and congestion and noise. He said some neighbors in East Fork Estates worried that a multi-family housing develop-

ment would interfere with that sense of peace and solitude.

As a solution, Goode and his neighbors have agreed to implement restrictions on future development, which would keep the larger lots, possibly with single-family homes, toward the edges that border East Fork Estates and congregate the more congested, multi-family housing development toward the center of the 50-acre property, providing a sort of "buffer" for Goode's closest neighbors. They have also hammered out agreements concerning a private road and storm-water facility to assure East Fork Estates property owners that they will not suffer any adverse effects of a future multi-family housing development on Goode's property.

"We're working together on this," Goode said of himself and his neighbors. "If we can meet the needs of everyone ... I think we should do that."

The city is taking public comments on the proposed annexation until 4:30 p.m. Thurs., March 3. For more information, visit www.lacenter.wa.gov/city_departments/pdfs/Annex_SEPA_Checklist.pdf.

County Council pushes back Alternative 4 decision

Councilors to continue hearing Tuesday morning

JC CORTEZ
Staff reporter

VANCOUVER - The Clark County Council pushed back an expected decision Feb. 16 regarding the fate of a preferred alternative for the county's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update.

After nearly 5 hours of staff reports, public comment and deliberations, councilors made the decision to reconvene the hearing at 10 a.m. Tue., Feb. 23 during the next regular council meeting.

Clark County Councilors approved a preferred alternative modeled on the hotly debated Alternative 4 in late 2015 during a series intense meetings, forums

and hearings before the new 5-person council took office in January. The new council has reversed several decisions made by the previous 3-person council in the final days of 2015, and the current council Alternative 4 plan has come under renewed scrutiny.

Some officials and Clark County residents have argued that a fast-approaching deadline leaves too little time to make changes and corrections in the wake of a recent report from R.W. Thorpe and Associates, an engineering firm tasked with examining the plan and the new set of planning assumptions it was based upon. That report found half of the new assumptions faulty, prompting opponents to call for Alternative 4 to be shelved until a new, more accurate plan can be adopted.

Carol Levanen, secretary for the pro-Alt 4 group Clark County Citizens United, called on

rural residents to contact councilors to express support for the measure in an email blast following the meeting.

"Although there is much support for Alternative 4, the councilors still need to hear from rural folks between now and next Tuesday," she wrote. "Especially Julie Olson, Jeanne Stewart, and Mark Bobit. Alternative 4 only has 2 votes now and (we need) one of these (councilors) to change their mind."

State Rep. Liz Pike R-Washougal sent a letter in support of

Alternative 4 to the Clark County Council ahead of the meeting.

"I urge you to respect the wishes of an overwhelming majority of our constituents and reaffirm Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative in efforts to update Clark County's Land Use Plan," Pike wrote.

Check www.theReflector.com Tuesday evening for coverage of the continued hearing.

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