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 noted for townhouses, 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 Eisemann, 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,” Eisemann explained. “There is no development proposed. 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 city’s planning code, medium-density 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 70-235 units with 15 percent of the city’s housing mix designated as low-density residential and 25 percent listed as medium-density residential. Currently, La Center has less than 1 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 it it wasn’t what he and originally dreamed of developing on his 50-acre property.

“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 “new 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, when viewed as the planned casino-hotel resort on the nearby Cowitzia Indian Reservation, he suspected that La Center would soon be in demand 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, Eisemann 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 20 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 development would interfere with the sense of peace and solitude.

As a solution, Goode and his neighbors have agreed to implement restraints on future development, which would keep the larger homes, possibly with single-family homes, toward the edges that border East Fork Estates and conglomerate 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 stormwater facility to assure East Fork Estates property owners that they will not suffer any adverse effects from 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.ci.centerwa.mysity_ departments/pdf/Annen_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 hastily defeated Alternative 4 in late 2015 during a series of intense meetings, forums and hearings before the now-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 county’s Alternative 4 plan has come under renewed scrutiny.

Dozens of Clark and St. helens 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. Thoors and Associates, an engineering firm tasked with examining the medium-density rezoning assumptions it was based on.

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 Levenson, secretary for the pro-A4 group Clark County Citizens United, called on councilors to contact concerned councils 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 John Olsen, Jeanne Stewers and Mark Bedah. Alternative 4 only has 3 votes now and we need one of these (councilors) to change their mind.”

State Rep. Liz Pike R-Wash. sent a letter in support of Alternative 4 to the Clark County Council ahead of the meeting.

“I urge you to respect the values of an overwhelming majority of our constituents and reaffirm Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative in efforts to maintain Clark County’s Land Use Plan,” Pike wrote.

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

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