

Airpark Village wins employment zoning amendment

But Goff must restart annexation process before redevelopment

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Fort Collins City Council voted on the side of new development and against the city planning and zoning board at its Sept. 6 meeting.

The council voted unanimously - with Councilman David Roy absent - to approve an amendment to the East Mulberry Corridor Plan to allow employment zoning for the Airpark Village development. The city council's decision clashes with the planning and zoning board's unanimous recommendation to not amend the plan.

Airpark Village is a proposed 148-acre development for the Downtown Fort Collins Airport and some surrounding properties. Developer Lloyd Goff acquired an option of the airport land last June and has since held a series of neighborhood meetings seeking input on development plans.

The Fort Collins Downtown Airpark is located outside the city limits and is zoned for industrial uses. In April, Goff submitted a request to the Fort Collins planning and zoning board asking for annexation into the city and rezoning to the employment category. Employment zoning would allow for a greater variety of development, including hotels, offices and residential.

In order to rezone the entire development as employment, the East Mulberry Corridor Plan - which includes the airport site - would need to be amended. In its current form, the East Mulberry plan calls for a blend of industrial and employment zoning for the property upon annexation.

It is not common for the city council to unanimously vote against a unanimous recommendation from the planning and zoning board.

The board voted twice to deny the change in zoning due the potential for conflict with several existing businesses. Michael Hansen, general manager of Century Helicopters, and Robert Dean, owner of Front Range Helicopter, presented their cases at previous council meetings.

Hansen and Dean contend that because employment zoning would allow structures such as high-rise hotels and several-story high mixed-use residential units, such a zoning would harm their businesses, both located near the southern border of the airport.

"Safety is the number-one concern that we have," Hansen said, adding that the other major concern is noise complaints.

"We're not against the redevelopment of the airport," he clarified. "We're against the employment zoning."

Neither Hansen nor Dean was present at the Sept. 6 city council meeting, leaving the city council members with little reason to oppose the amendment. Councilman Kelly Ohlson said it is rare that he would not take a unanimous recommendation from the board.

In fact, the council voted to approve the amendment but will only allow a conditional zoning. The condition will limit the residential uses to mixed-use dwelling units.

The representatives of the helicopter businesses were not absent due to apathy, they say.

"Nobody notified us," said Hansen. "We received one notice in writing back in April."

Dean said that he contacted the current planning staff prior to the city council meeting, but was either misinformed or misheard the actual date of the city council consideration. He said he believed the zoning amendment came before city council on Sept. 20.

Ted Shepard, a chief planner in the current planning department, said he was not aware if the amendment was ever scheduled to go to city council on Sept. 20. He added that because he was in contact with Dean, he assumed he knew the appropriate date.

Larry Hansen, owner of Century Helicopters, contacted Mayor Doug Hutchinson upon receiving the news that the council meeting had come and gone without his notification. Hutchinson said he asked City Manager Darin Atteberry to look into the reason for the missed notification.

Hutchinson added that the city council only approved to amend the East Mulberry Corridor Plan. Issues of compatibility with the helicopters businesses, he said, would be addressed during the development review process.

Despite this fact, Hansen said he felt blindsided by the meeting.

"It makes you wonder about the legitimacy of the process," he said.

It could be a while before the development even gets into the review process. According to Shepard, the Airpark Village developers must reinitiate annexation because the initial resolution expired.

Once that process starts, at least 30 days must pass before there can be a first reading of the zoning and annexation.

Plans for the Airpark Village development include a hotel and convention center, mixed-use residential units, offices, supporting retail and

development center that would focus around "next generation" infrastructure.

Goff's development team estimates the annual revenue generated by the completed project would be more than \$16 million.

Goff said he has already narrowed the development team for the infrastructure work down to three firms - none located in the region.

Having scaled the zoning amendment mountain, Goff said his team will begin to take on issues that are comparative hills, such as dealing with the flood channel, creating a special district, and others.

"Now, we'll be generating community support," he said. "That's our fall agenda."