

DEVELOPMENT

Brookridge redevelopment plan sparks emotions at Overland Park meeting

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR



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There were tears.

There were shouts of anger.

One resident even got up to the podium and sang Joni Mitchell’s “Big Yellow Taxi.”

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Replay

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By the end of the specially scheduled Overland Park Planning Commission meeting on Monday night, one thing was clear: Many residents living near Brookridge Golf & Fitness don't want to see their paradise, an 18-hole golf course, paved for a mixed-use development.

The Planning Commission continued the public hearing until May so the developer can work with the city about concerns.

Curtin Property Co. plans to remove the entire golf course east of Antioch Road, for what its owner, Chris Curtin, deemed "the most innovative plan in the history of Overland Park."

The proposed development for the 138-acre tract, which sits at the northeast corner of I-435 and Antioch, calls for 2.5 million square feet of office space, with buildings ranging from four to 12 stories. It also features 40 acres of green space, with walkways, a small lake, a fountain, pedestrian-friendly streets and a bike network.

There are also plans for two boutique hotels, a movie theater, a 3,500-seat enclosed performance venue, and of course, retail and residential units.

The development could take around 20 years to complete.

"The north has seen very little development over the last 25 years," said Curtin. "Everything has been sprawling south. We looked at how we could change that paradigm before we sprawl straight into Oklahoma."

He said the development could help re-center Overland Park, since the land is the only tract in the northern part of the city with the qualities necessary for such a large-scale mixed use development.

But during a public hearing at the special Planning Commission meeting, residents who live near the golf course emotionally voiced concerns about the density of the project, a heavy increase in traffic, and declining property values.

"I put a deck on my house last summer because of the beautiful view of the green space," said Barry Osborn, who lives off Antioch. "It's awesome to wake up to every morning. This project has rendered my house useless now with its mere existence, because if this thing passes, there's going to be a parking garage in my backyard. Now I couldn't even sell my house if I wanted to because of the devaluation of my property."

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“Inside my house we can hear Friday night football games all the way from Shawnee Mission South,” which is to the east near Lamar Avenue, she explained. “Twenty years of construction noise will make a horrific impact on my life and to everyone who lives around me. Plus, it will disrupt learning for 20 years worth of students at that elementary school.”

Most of the residents who spoke were concerned about the increase in traffic, not just on the main drags, but in their neighborhoods.

“This project is too intense for the road system to handle, even if improvements are made,” said Mark Hunter. “I cut through my own neighborhood to get to Hy-Vee or Home Depot, and the 4,000 plus people who are going to be living 170 feet away from me will learn the same trick.”

City staff members also expressed concerns about traffic.

A traffic analysis concluded the increase in cars would most likely require the eventual widening of Antioch, in that vicinity, to eight lanes and the addition of turn lanes on 103rd.

After hearing staff’s concerns and residents’ frustrations, the Planning Commission decided there were too many unanswered questions.

It continued the public hearing until its May meeting, so staff could work with the developers to address those issues and iron out the details.

Despite their concerns, however, many commissioners said they were intrigued by the plan and think the project may be a good fit for the area, should the right changes be made.

“I like the concept, but there is a lot about this project that scares the heck out of me,” said Commissioner David Hill. “There’s a lot to consider. I’ve been on the Planning Commission for 15 years and I think this is one of the biggest projects we’ve ever encountered. I’m not even close to making up my mind, and now after hearing the residents talk, I’m also worried about density and home values.”

Commissioner Ned Reitzes agreed.

“I like a lot of things the developer has done here and I think the site has promise for mixed use,” he said. “That being said, there is a lot of room for improvements.”

With the commission leaning on the positive side, Curtin remained optimistic by the end of the meeting.

He was a little disheartened by the residents’ vocalization against the project, however.

He said after the meeting that he is doing everything he can to please them. As the result of listening to their concerns during numerous meetings, his team has made 131 changes to the development plan, including reducing the density of the project from 8.5 million square feet to 6 million.

They also included a significant landscape buffer between the residential homes and the development.

Curtin said that after working with the city, and taking another look at the details, there could be some more fine-tuning on the plan.

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“I’m touched by the people in this room,” he said. “They’re passionate about their homes and I have a lot of respect for them. Some people don’t want to see change, which is understandable, but change really is inevitable.”

The Planning Commission will hold another public hearing and consider the rezoning and development plan for the Brookridge development at its meeting at 1:30 p.m. on May 11.

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