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Controversial project gets residential zoning

Planning board grants request even though developer is a fugitive

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By MIKE WIGGINS
The Daily Sentinel

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Despite opposition from several residents and the fugitive status of the developer behind the project, the Grand Junction Planning Commission recommended Tuesday night residential zoning for a controversial Orchard Mesa property.

The commission voted 5-1 to recommend zoning nearly 18 acres at 166 Edlun Road to allow the construction of two homes an acre. Commissioner Ken Sublett cast the lone dissenting vote. Commissioner Reginald Wall was absent from the meeting.

The City Council will have the final say on the zoning of the land.

The property is adjacent to the Old Spanish Trail and is owned by The Shores LLC, a corporation created by Weld County developer Mark Strodtman. A Weld County grand jury indicted Strodtman in March on charges including theft, forgery and racketeering.

Strodtman is accused of deceiving buyers into purchasing homes owned by his real estate company, JS Real Estate LLC, and deceiving lenders into loaning money for the project. He is wanted on a $100,000 warrant.

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Lori Bowers, a senior planner with the city, told planning commissioners that zoning for two homes an acre was more appropriate given the fact that the property contains steep slopes and could be difficult to access. The Bureau of Land Management owns an exclusive easement off Sunlight Drive, one of the two roads proposed to access the development. The other road, Edlun Road, is only 22 feet wide at the point where it would lead into the subdivision.

Kris Pickett, a consultant on the project with Value Engineering Services LLC, asked the commission for zoning that would permit four houses an acre.

He argued that the higher-density zoning is compatible with adjacent properties and that a lower-density zoning, given the topographical constraints, would reduce the number of homes that could be built from 48 to 26.

Neighbors asked the planning commission to withhold zoning the land altogether, saying they are concerned the development could threaten the Old Spanish Trail. The Shores LLC owns a total of 400 acres in the area, and the property is bisected by the trail.

“I don’t want a plaque at the end of Sunlight Road saying that this is where the Old Spanish Trail was,” said Ineke Hoops, who lives next to the property owned by The Shores LLC.

Some also expressed doubt about the adequacy of the roads leading to the development and whether they could handle increased traffic.

“That little bottleneck is a big problem,” Lynn Ensley said of the narrow entrance to the property off Edlun Road. “Unless you’re going to go in there and take people’s personal property, you’re going to have a big problem.”

State Sen. Josh Penry, R-Grand Junction, and Mesa County Commissioner Janet Rowland wrote letters to the planning commission, asking the board to delay a decision on the zoning to give local government officials and residents time to explore the possibility of pursuing open space funds to protect the trail.

“These lands are an important resource to this community, and to the history of the West, and as such, are obvious candidates for open space conservation,” Penry wrote.

Planning Commissioner Roland Cole, however, said zoning the property would not preclude stakeholders from pursuing open space funding.

“I do not think that the trail issue should be part of this hearing tonight,” he said. “That will be dealt with later.”

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