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City on wrong trail with O.M. annexation

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Tuesday, July 01, 2008

Grand Junction officials may try to tap dance around exactly what they did Monday night. But after stripping away all the technicalities they will throw up in their defense, this is what they did: Despite vigorous opposition from neighbors, the City Council annexed and rezoned 18 acres on Orchard Mesa that is adjacent to the Old Spanish Trail, changes that were sought by a developer who didn't even show up for the hearing. He has been indicted on theft, forgery and racketeering charges and authorities believe he is on the lam in Mexico.

City officials will tell you that developer Mark Strodman's name didn't appear on the application. That may be technically correct, but it is Strodman who sought the rezone to two units per acre.

They will also tell you that the Persigo agreement required them to annex the property. That document requires that any land within the service boundaries of the Persigo Wastewater Treatment Plant be annexed to the city once its owner seeks to develop it.

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However, that's a claim which makes us ask: If the City Council had to annex the property, then why even bother to discuss it and vote on it? What would have happened had the council voted not to annex it?

But the larger issue is the Old Spanish Trail. Neighbors are quite justifiably concerned that the development will have a detrimental effect on what is one of the area's more significant historic resources.

City officials paid lip service to protecting the trail, but council's 6-0 vote said much more about the importance they really place on the Old Spanish Trail.

That is also a concern of at least two elected officials. State Sen. Josh Penry and County Commissioner Janet Rowland had both urged no action be taken on the annexation and rezoning request while efforts were under way to get historic preservation grants to protect the trail.

They both told city officials that they think preservation of the trail is important.

We don't know what, if any, options are left for the neighborhood, but we wish neighbors and trail enthusiasts the best of luck.

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