

Confusion, controversy continue on Valley River Center rezoning

By ANN BECKER
Of the Emerald

Confusion and controversy raged Thursday night in City Council chambers, as the council and city planners listened to arguments concerning a proposed expansion of Valley River Center.

Valley River wants 21 acres west of the shopping center (and lying north of the Willamette River) to be rezoned for commercial use, so that a new Montgomery Ward store can be added.

Downtown merchants, various civic groups and city planners have opposed this rezoning, saying, among other things, that it transfers one more store out of the downtown area to Valley River. This, they claim, is contrary to the city's long range planning study, the 1990 Plan.

This rezoning question is considerably complicated by the fact that both planners and council are trying to evaluate the case using brand-new criteria.

The Fasano decision, made by the Oregon Supreme Court last spring, lays down new rules concerning zoning changes.

It changes the city council's role from a legislative to a more judicial role.

According to the Fasano decision, the group desiring a change in zoning must come before the council and prove with facts 1) that the zone change would fit into the long-range planning for the community, 2) that the change would satisfy a public need and 3) that the property in question is better than any other property available that is already zoned for that purpose.

This is what the advocates of the Valley River expansion attempted to do Thursday for the third time in five months.

Vernon Gleaves, attorney for Valley River, presented most of their arguments. He said the proposed expansion of the shopping center is not contrary to the 1990 Plan. He said that while some people in the community feared that the downtown area is being "transported parcel by parcel to the shopping center" this fear is not applicable to the situation. "The Montgomery Ward store in downtown Eugene will close," he said, regardless of the council's decision. 1990 plan provided for other properties in the city to be developed, not just the downtown area. "You can't pick one area and say that it overrides the others," he said, adding that to say the development of Valley River couldn't continue was wrong, since the council had already "committed themselves" by allowing the initial shopping center to be built.

Gleaves also said that the land along the riverbank would be preserved as the 1990 plan advised and that Valley River would dedicate a bike path there.

Gleaves said that the present transportation situation would not be drastically affected. He said that Valley River has consistently supported Lane Mass Transit and has cooperated with them "in every way possible."

Gleaves concluded saying that Valley Rivers case is logical since it directly abuts the present shopping center. "This is not land scattering, and certainly not speculation," he said. He claimed that the city council can't deny Valley River's request

because of the parking situation, because of the recent approval of large free parking areas downtown. "That wouldn't be a consistent application," he said. He admitted that the core area is vital to Eugene, but said that "zoning must meet regional as well as city needs."

"This is not a downtown versus Valley River fight," Gleaves said. "Both areas can survive and continue to compete."

John Burgess, regional real estate manager for Montgomery Ward, urged the council to "weigh the long range value of their decision." He said trying to force Wards to stay downtown was "involuntary servitude" and that the rezoning had "nothing to do with whether Wards is in the downtown area or not." Relocation downtown is impossible, he claimed, because of the high cost of property, the high cost of construction and the sales volume projection. He said that mass transit can't be relied upon and that at least a two story parking structure was needed, which would be too expensive.

Brian Obie, head of the Lane County Planning Commission, said he was not speaking for the commission, but said that he felt the proposal was not in conflict with the 1990 Plan. Developing Valley River without allowing further expansion would be "leading the applicant down the primrose path" since Valley River is supposed to be a regional shopping center.

Wards' move, he said, is based on "economic reality...core development can't be forced—it can only be nurtured and encouraged. It is our responsibility to develop alternate areas, too," he said.

Van Herbert said the only reason the rezoning was needed was to allow for additional parking. Fourteen acres of land still exist near Valley River, which are zoned for commercial use, and he said these are adequate for the building being planned, plus some parking. Instead, he claimed, there will be "acres of asphalt" which he termed "exorbitant, wasteful use of land."

He concluded saying, that in his opinion the rezoning was in direct conflict to the 1990 Plan.

Annabelle Hitzhopper, president of the League of Women Voters, said they oppose the further expansion in the good pasture Road area until "some decisions are made." They feel the rezoning would adversely affect core and transportation problems. She said that the 1990 plan was a plan for development up to 1990, but that the area doesn't need to be developed right now.

Following the public comments on the issue, the planning commission staff gave their report on the situation.

They said that the zone change will have "substantial" effects on the future of Eugene. They admitted that in the 1990 plan the land had originally been designated as future commercial land, but said that this area was designated in case of great population increases within the next 15 year. He said that it is true that alternate areas have been planned for, but stressed that the downtown area must remain the central area.

The meeting was adjourned at this point to be continued tonight at 7:30 in the council chambers, where the rest of the staff report will be given, a rebuttal made and the case decided.

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R-G ad policy challenged by rug dealer

A Eugene Register-Guard advertising policy that has been on the books for close to 50 years has a San Francisco businessman pulling his hair out.

George Barkhordarian sells Persian rugs. His operation entails advertising rug auctions in West Coast cities and then journeying to those cities to sell his product. Barkhordarian is upset because the Register-Guard will not accept his advertisement. Ross Johnson, Register-Guard advertising director, says that it has been the paper's policy since the late 1920's not to accept "advertising of a retail nature originating from outside of our trade and our circulation areas." The purpose of the policy, Johnson says, is "to try and help the economic picture in our area; which is basically Lane County."

Johnson says the Register-

Guard turns down \$25 thousand to \$30 thousand a year worth of outside advertisement.

Barkhordarian, a 1966 University graduate, claims the reason for his being denied advertisement is quite different. Victor Barkhordarian, George's brother and partner in business, says that Jim Frazer, a Register-Guard advertising department employee, called him last week and said that the advertising request was turned down because of "pressure from above." Barkhordarian says Frazer told him Meier and Frank and one other department store in the Eugene area (which Frazer did not name) had expressed displeasure with the outside competition.

Frazer told the Emerald Thursday that Barkhordarian's statement was not true and that Johnson would be the man who

would answer any other questions.

George Barkhordarian further questioned the statement that the Register-Guard has had the policy on its books since the 1920's. According to Barkhordarian, the paper ran their ad in May of this year.

Barkhordarian says he doesn't need the ad to auction rugs in Eugene. "It's the whole principle behind it. They (the Register-Guard) are killing commerce. They are allowing a monopoly on the rug business." Barkhordarian says he will probably take the Register-Guard to court if they continue to refuse his ads. The possibility of a court case doesn't really bother Johnson. He says all 48 continental U.S. State Supreme Courts have tried cases similar to this one, and in each case the newspaper has won

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