

Council Makes No Decision on Rezoning *continued from front page*

city, there is no evidence that rezoning land on Rose and Weed Avenue to a DT zone will destabilize the land use pattern or adversely affect existing planned uses on adjacent lands. According to the staff report a DT zone would allow property owners more opportunities of how they may choose to use their land and possibly add more value. The DT zone also clearly permits single family detached dwellings to remain as a residence indefinitely.

One of the major questions raised by property owners is about their ability to receive financing from lending institutions if their properties are rezoned from residential to some type of commercial zone, especially if they are damaged. The DT zone that is being considered allows both residential and some types of business uses in the same neighborhood. During the City Council hearing citizens expressed that they do not believe the City has adequately answered their concerns in regards to the financing questions if the zoning for their properties is changed. Citizens have been told that they can rebuild their homes even if they are damaged up to 80%, but according to testimony, there remains questions about this issue.

Sally Harrison testified against the zoning changes and questioned whether all three components needed to be rezoned all together. Don Willard expressed his concerns that the process has been done rather quickly and that the Planning Commission did not listen to the citizens. Willard asked if the City could give citizens thirty to sixty days to review the staff report and asked for openness, transparency and dialog. Kristie Freeman, whose property is no longer being considered for rezoning but does back up to properties that would be rezoned, stated that she thought the project has moved too quickly, that concerns by citizens have been disregarded, and asked what the sounds of her neighborhood would be like if it is changed from residential to downtown and businesses are developed near her property. Gary Mayer questioned parking in the area, especially since the City has not finished a parking ordinance that affects the downtown properties. Sam Poetter testified that he has a vested interest through family ownership and asked that the City confirm the financial impact for citizens.

City Planner Carole Connell responded to the citizen's testimony. Connell stated that the language in the city code for a DT zone is somewhat ambiguous but does state that a house that is 80% or more destroyed CAN be

rebuilt and that financial lenders that the City spoke with said that, as long as the city code allows for rebuilding, that financing is not a problem. Connell also stated that the original proposal called for forty-six properties to be rezoned from GR to DT and the Planning Commission removed twenty of those properties from consideration, indicating that the Commission did reply to citizen concerns. Connell also addressed the fact that the Planning Commission held three meetings over two months and that no one ever approached her outside of those meetings to discuss alternative proposals or attempted to create additional dialog with the City. Connell stated that there was little opposition expressed at the Planning Commission hearing and so the Commission made their decision to send their recommendation for approval to Council. Connell addressed the question about parking, agreeing that the Planning Commission is still working to decide if there is actually a parking problem, that each parcel would be unique and so it is difficult to address ahead of any zoning changes, and that the Planning Commission and City Council are working on a proposal to develop a small fee for businesses that are unable to provide required parking on their properties. Connell addressed an alternative proposal to rezone a piece of property just off Rose Avenue at the end of Maple Avenue, stating that the property has riparian issues that would create development constraints. Connell also stated that there are three vacancies on the Planning Commission and suggested that anyone who wanted to participate and volunteer would be welcome to apply for a position.

At both the Planning Commission hearing on September 20, and the City Council hearing on October 1, there were concerns raised during public testimony about the third component to the rezoning project, the rezoning of the property on California Avenue from GR to LI, including whether property owner Casey Mitchell is receiving preferential treatment for rezoning and whether it is appropriate to develop light industry in an area that has flooded in the past.

The property is owned by Casey Mitchell, the husband of Vernonia Mayor Josette Mitchell. Casey Mitchell is hoping to develop the site for industrial use. The Mitchell property contains a large raised concrete structure which was formerly the Planer Shed on the Oregon-American Mill which previously occupied the site. Current plans call for the relocation of Photo Solutions, a high tech, manufacturing business that is located in the flood hazard zone

in Vernonia. Photo Solutions currently employs nine local residents and is in need of a larger facility. Curtis is the brother of Casey Mitchell.

Mitchell's property was used by the Vernonia School District to place dirt that was removed during the excavation for a wetland mitigation project as part of the new school construction project. The Mitchell property is north of California Avenue across the road from the wetland project.

According to testimony provided by Dr. Kenneth Cox, Superintendent of the Vernonia School District, the District was required to create a seven acre wetland, which was to be built on city owned property. The District published a Request for Proposal (RFP) which indicated that the dirt removed from the wetlands could be stockpiled near the site. According to Cox, it was not until after the District published the RFP that the District discovered the proposed site for the dirt did not, in fact, belong to the City but to Mitchell. The district then negotiated with Mitchell for use of his site, saving, according to Cox, the district well over \$200,000 in fees to haul the dirt away.

Photo Solutions owner Curtis testified in writing in favor of the rezoning stating that this company has been operating in Vernonia for twenty-three years and would like to remain in the community. He stated that the only economical way for his business to remain in Vernonia is to rebuild in an area designed for light industry that can hopefully attract additional businesses, Curtis added that his business is currently in growth mode and expects to add five to ten new jobs over the next few years.

Casey Mitchell testified that the concrete structure on the property is two and a half feet above the last flood. Mitchell noted that it has been very difficult identifying potential sites to relocate Photo Solutions and that Vernonia is not well suited for light industrial, mentioning access to Highway

VERNONIA'S voice

reflecting the spirit of our community

Publisher and Managing Editor

Scott Laird

503-367-0098

scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Contributors

Lynn Berry
Dr. Carol McIntyre
DeAnna Pearl
Gayle Rich-Boxman
Sarah Rossi
Christopher Sedlmeyer
Michal Smith
Melissa Zavales

Photography

Scott Laird
Gayle Rich-Boxman
Denise Way

Want to advertise?
Have an article?

Contact: scott@vernoniasvoice.com

One year subscriptions
(24 issues) \$35

Vernonia's Voice is published
on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday
of each month.

Vernonia's Voice, LLC
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098

www.VernoniasVoice.com

47 as an important factor. Mitchell also testified that only about two acres of the seven-plus acre site would be developed and the impact to neighbors would be minimal; the rest of the property would remain green space.

The Vernonia City Council agreed to put off any decision on the rezoning so that all members could be present for any additional discussion, so citizens could have additional time to review the Staff Report and so any additional information that was needed could be gathered.

"Community Conversations"

Vernonia Connects

invites you to join your neighbors in a series of discussions designed to create change within the community and engage citizens through frank and open dialog.

1 Community Livability
October 8 at 7 PM &
October 13 at 2 PM

will feature conversations about:

- Utility Rates • Emergency Preparedness • Community Pride
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse • Safety and Security

All events will be held in the Vernonia Schools Library
Childcare will be provided Dessert will be served

Mark your calendar for the entire series

2 Youth and Education
Oct 22 at 7 PM & Oct 27 at 2 PM

3 Community Development
Nov 10 at 2 PM & Nov 12 at 7 PM

4 Business and Economic Development
Dec 11 at 7 PM & Dec 15 at 2 PM



VernoniaConnects
Engaged. Informed. Together.

Vernonia Connects aims to strengthen community vitality by building communication, connectivity and collaboration among local leaders, organizations and community members.



Happy Hour Mon-Fri 4-7
Lady's Night Wed 5-12

"STILL BIKER FRIENDLY"

EVENTS

Oct. 13
Texas Hold 'Em
Oct. 20
Random Access
Oct. 27
Stepchild

Now Beer & Kegs to go

- Specialty hamburgers
- Draft beer & mixed drinks
- Pool tables & satellite TV
- Special live music events
- Free Wi-fi

Sun - Thurs 11 AM - Midnight • Fri - Sat 11 AM - 2:30 AM
733 Bridge St, Vernonia • 503-429-9999