

SOUTH WILLAMETTE DEBATE HAS CITYWIDE IMPLICATIONS

A landslide of citizen protests led the Eugene City Council to vote to postpone a proposed plan to rezone major portions of the South Willamette neighborhood. Those citizens, the South Willamette Neighbors, have united in a badge-wearing, yard-sign bearing movement against the plan, saying the rezoning could ruin the “single-family home” feel of their 20-minute neighborhood.

According to the city of Eugene, a 20-minute neighborhood is one that lets residents access “places and services they use daily including grocery stores, restaurants, schools and parks, without relying heavily on a car.”

The special zone area, from north of 23rd Avenue to the area around Donald Street, is a mix of local business such as Tasty Thai Kitchen and Laundrama as well as national corporations including 7-Eleven, Lube-It USA and McDonald's. Residences range from single-family homes to apartment buildings.

At the behest of the citizens who feel the plan is being pushed through with little respect for the neighborhood, council member Mike Clark first made a motion at the Oct. 21 City Council meeting to postpone a public hearing on the South Willamette Special Area Zone (SW-SAZ) until Jan. 19. Afterward, Clark winked in the direction of the South Willamette neighbors.

Clark said he wanted the later date to give the council more time to hear from citizens.

City Manager Jon Ruiz and the city attorney said they didn't think a revised change to the 80-page plan could effectively be written by Jan. 19. On Oct. 26, the City Council decided to further delay the hearing until March 14.

Other councilors who voted against the original motion, which passed 5-3, were concerned that Clark's proposal has citywide implications, calling to prevent the city from changing building rules or zoning on any property zoned R-1 for low-density, single-family homes.

Mia Nelson, urban specialist with 1000 Friends of Oregon, later wrote the council, saying, “It's apparent that the motion, if implemented, would violate state law.” She adds, “It is contrary to Envision Eugene's fundamental assumptions and could make the city's climate goals impossible to achieve.”

According to Nelson, who calls for the vote to be rescinded, Clark's motion “discriminates against persons living in multi-family housing and may conflict with the city's fair and affordable housing policies.”

Clark's motion says the delayed meeting is necessary so the council can bring back potential changes to the plan.

Local business owner Paul Moore of Arriving By Bike on South Willamette says he is in favor of the

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zoning plan because it prioritizes urban density over urban sprawl. As someone who sells bikes for a living, Moore stressed that a carefully calculated zoning plan for the next 20 years can help businesses that need a well-coordinated transportation area for bikers and walkers. With urban density, he says, the whole point is that it reduces the need for a car.

“A lot of my customers live in the neighborhood around the store,” Moore tells *EW*. “It's almost as easy for them to stumble a couple blocks to get to us than to get something on the internet.”

Scott Landfield, owner of Tsunami Books, has posted a sign “Stop Forced Re-zoning” outside his business. Landfield said the city's Planning Commission, which developed the zoning plan, is always under enormous pressure from major real estate developers. He says “the people” of his neighborhood are not looking for big corporations to take over their area, and he is actively promoting an online petition against the zoning plan at swneugene.org/sign. As of Oct. 26, the petition had 210 signatures. — *Jeslyn Lemke*

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