

# McNary grapples with identity, future

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

A request for a zoning change in Umatilla has revealed conflicting visions for the future of the McNary neighborhood.

The city council grappled with questions last week about whether to pursue commercial or residential development opportunities on empty lots in McNary, and in the end decided to extend a public hearing to its April 5 meeting in order to give residents a chance to discuss and make their opinions heard.

"I can see both sides of the coin," councilor Mark Ribich said.

At the heart of the matter is a 9-acre piece of property located on Willamette Avenue across from the Quality Inn. Currently, the property is zoned commercial, but a Pasco-based developer called Fastrack Inc. is requesting the city rezone the property for single-family dwellings so that it can build 38 new homes.

The request sparked a larger conversation: Does the city maintain its vision of McNary as a community where someday residents could walk down the street to get a haircut, a cup of coffee and a new shirt? Or does it give up that land to housing, keeping McNary largely residential but possibly attracting new families — followed by new businesses — into the city's tax base?

Councilor David Lougee called providing more quality housing for families a "noble effort" that the city should support.

"I've lived in McNary for 13 years and I like the idea of it being a bedroom community," he said.

Councilor Sharon Farnsworth agreed, noting that the property in



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The Umatilla City Council is looking for input on whether to rezone areas of the McNary subdivision from commercial to residential, which would allow a new housing development.

question had been on and off the market for decades and no commercial developers had ever taken the opportunity.

The city recently completed a year-long overhaul of its comprehensive plan, however, and councilor Mel Ray questioned why the city hadn't changed the zoning to residential then if it was really the best option.

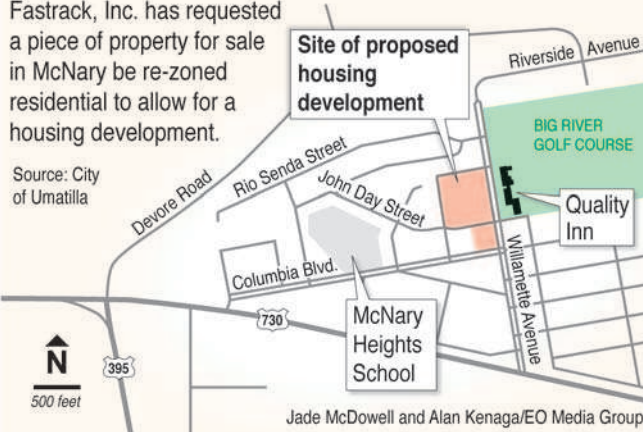
"We've only had this comprehensive plan for that area in place for four months. ... All of the sudden we're going to throw that whole thing out and build houses?" he asked.

Ribich said he thought the city should focus on

## Proposed McNary housing development

Fastrack, Inc. has requested a piece of property for sale in McNary be re-zoned residential to allow for a housing development.

Source: City of Umatilla



Jade McDowell and Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

encouraging developers to build new housing closer to downtown, creating more of a demand for businesses to fill emp-

ty storefronts on Sixth Street.

Mayor David Trott said he disliked the way people talked about being from McNary or Umatilla as if they were two separate towns.

"I think we ought to focus on Umatilla as a community," he said.

If McNary, located across the interstate and down the highway from the rest of Umatilla, seems like a separate town — that's because it started out that way. The McNary townsite was built east of Umatilla in 1948 as a "home town" for the Army Corps of Engineers while the McNary Dam was being built. In 1949 it housed an estimated 850 people and had its own post office, library and shopping center.

Eventually the dam was completed, however, and most of the workers who had called McNary



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home moved on. In 1964 the entire townsite was purchased from the federal government by a private developer.

McNary changed hands again in 1973 when Jerry D. Smith and Associates purchased the 344-acre site for a reported \$750,000 and began selling off the houses there. At the developer's request the McNary townsite was annexed into Umatilla on Oct. 1, 1973, adding 204 residents to the city.

"The townsite will be developed as we see the needs unfold," developer Shannon Kollmeyer told the *Hermiston Herald* at the time, noting plans for new apartments, houses and 15 acres set aside for commercial development.

Today McNary's commercial offerings are mostly limited to a few offices, McNary Market, the Quality Inn and Big River Golf Course.

Fastrack Inc. owner Arnie Wick said he recently built two houses in McNary, and the first time he and his wife drove through there they wondered why no one had snatched up property across from a golf course and down the street from a school for a housing development.

"We thought, 'What's going on here?'" he said.

When he found out from Linda Andreason of Miller Realty that the property was zoned commercial and had been on the market for most years since 1979, he decided to

approach the city about changing the zoning designation so he could build 38 homes with a value of \$130,000 to \$160,000 each.

Andreason said there is a strong demand for ranch-style homes in that price range in Hermiston and Umatilla.

"We get phone calls all the time," she said. "People are looking and there's not a lot out there for them."

McNary resident Daren Duffloth told the city council that he supported the zoning change.

"I drive past there all the time and I've wondered the same thing: Why the heck isn't there anything there?" he said. "If it's a zoning issue, let's fix it."

The downside to the proposal is that the development would leave little room for commercial growth in McNary. Approving Fastrack's request would reduce the amount of buildable commercial land there from 15 acres to 6, spread across five lots.

Another concern expressed in planning commission documents and at the March 1 meeting is that a crop of tightly spaced new homes would overload resources like parks, schools and on-street parking.

Citizens wishing to weigh in on the proposed zoning change can testify at the city's public hearing on April 5 at 7 p.m. at city hall.

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