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Council, commission approve TOD plans

By Frank Flaton, Hill Country News

After one night, two meetings, and lots of questions, the much-talked about and enthusiasm-inducing transit-oriented development (TOD) became substantially closer to becoming a reality.

The city of Leander's Planning and Zoning commission first passed an ordinance that would help make the development possible at 7 p.m. at a special-called meeting Thursday. The city's council then followed suit, passing the same ordinance and several others to set up a Tuesday annexation hearing that will bring 1,400 acres of TOD property into Leander. The rest of the property will be annexed as development commences.

The TOD is a 2,300-acre planned community which promises to potentially add more than a billion dollars of value to the land. It revolves around Capital Metro's future commuter rail system and its chief characteristics include walkability and mixed-use buildings that feature flexibility and both residential and commercial.

In one swoop, the council and the commission turned the area into a PUD (planned-unit development), a development that unlike traditional zoning, requires a master plan. The city approved that plan and its Smartcode which governs the master plan.

Only two Leander officials publicly spoke out against the TOD. Commissioner Frank Stiles was concerned that several landowners were not given the chance to decide how their property would be governed by the TOD's master plan and smart code. Councilmember John Perez said he felt he didn't have adequate numbers as to how much the development would cost the city and the taxpayers.

Other citizens told the council and the commission that they felt the city was moving too quickly with the TOD.

Backers of the TOD, however, were in the majority. They proclaimed its potential lucrateness for the city and the landowners.



"Not many cities get the chance to do this," City Manager Biff Johnson said.

The 77-page Smart code, is a complex document, but its zoning codes range from rural to intensely urbanized, a far cry from the current uninhabited ranch land that exists on most of the property at this point in time.

In order to meet the state-mandated annexation schedule for the TOD, the city was forced to jam multiple agenda items in to one meeting. Otherwise, the entire plan would have been set back six months, city officials said.

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