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## Joliet officials to unveil \$1 billion plans

### ROAD THROUGH JJC?

May 26, 2007

By Ken O'Brien STAFF WRITER

JOLIET -- City officials are about to unveil plans for a 325-acre development at Interstates 55 and 80 that could have a market value of \$1 billion, officials said Friday.

On Tuesday night, Joliet City Manager John Mezera will make a presentation to the Joliet Junior College Board about the project, which would be northeast of the intersection.

Mezera will discuss a proposal to build a four-lane road, which would run across the campus, from the development to Houbolt Road. Joliet would pay to build the road and the costs of improving existing roads on the campus, he said.

A California company, Santa Monica-based O&S Holdings, is proposing the Bridge Street Town Centre, which would be a "regional mixed-use lifestyle center" with big-box retailers, a movie theater and restaurants. The center would have upscale shops and would be in an outdoor setting, according to the company's Web site.

The plan also calls for building 1.5 million square feet of retail space; 800 multifamily and single-family units; and 200,000 square feet of office space. The company, on its Web site, says work on the development could start next year.

O&S Holdings says an average of 266,400 vehicles pass the location daily. The company also notes the explosive commercial and residential growth in Will County, citing the county's strategic location, transportation infrastructure, skilled labor force and "exceptional quality of life."

Mezera said city officials have worked with the developer for about 18 months. The city would need approval from JJC, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to place a bridge over Rock Run Creek, he said.

A preliminary plan could be presented to the city council in four to five months, Mezera said. Joliet would need to annex the land, but could provide water and sewer because its utility system now runs through the Rock Run Business Park, he said.

It is premature to say when the council could vote on a final plan, Mezera said. Construction of the first phase might be 2 to 3 years away and it could be fully built 3 to 4 years later, he said.

The company has options to buy the land near the interstate crossroads, Mezera said. But those options are tied to getting approval for the project, he said.

### Interchange

In recent years, city officials have been concerned about how the partial interchange at Illinois 59 and I-55 would affect their chances for developing the area. The proposed center's northwest corner would be near that interchange. Drivers going southbound on Illinois 59 can now get onto I-55 and northbound traffic on I-55 can exit onto Illinois 59.

A full interchange is needed for development to occur at the site, Mezera said. IDOT has a \$13.5 million improvement plan for the interchange.

The plan, however, does not include adding ramps to complete the interchange. In the 2007 budget, city officials allocated \$1 million for necessary road work.

"We have always said that if it had a full interchange, it would be a great site," Mezera said. "But we need to develop the interchange. The (development) would be good for the city and the college and the whole area. We are trying to determine who our partners will be."

The city has explored adding access routes that would connect the development to I-55 and I-80, Mezera said. JJC board Chairman Bo Wunderlich said college officials have seen four options for placing a road through the school's campus.

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### Some opposition

The proposed road has met opposition from JJC faculty and staff. Opposition has centered on the possibility the students who live on campus would have to cross the proposed four-lane road to get to class or that agricultural fields could be lost to the road. JJC employees are also concerned about how the road would affect the wooded areas of the campus and the adjacent Rock Run Forest Preserve.

"There are a lot of rumors and I have said to people, 'Let the city make its proposal,'" said JJC president Gena Proulx. "It is my understanding that (city officials) have heard what the campus is saying and are making some revisions."

Wunderlich said the development would be a "win-win" situation for Joliet and JJC. He said the "biggest question is where would the road and where would it have the least impact."

The road would need to go through the JJC campus in order to improve Olympia Boulevard, the entry south of the campus that goes into business park, Mezera said. Left turn lanes could be added to Houbolt and that would address increasing congestion on the road, he said.

The board meeting is at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the JJC main campus, 1215 Houbolt Road.

Contact reporter Ken O'Brien at (815) 729-6119 or [KOBRIEN@SCN1.COM](mailto:KOBRIEN@SCN1.COM)

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