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Plan commission approves annexation for retail project

March 21, 2008

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JOLIET -- The Bridge Street Town Centre got another green light Thursday.

The Joliet Plan Commission unanimously approved annexation and rezoning of 268 acres that comprise most of the land needed for the lifestyle retail center.

The annexation hearing also marked the first public test of opposition to the project.

Only two people spoke against it.

City officials are promoting the Bridge Street Town Centre as a dramatic boost to both Joliet's image and future economy.

The City Council Finance Committee this week approved a plan to finance a new interchange and road for the project with half of the sales tax dollars it would generate.

As planned, the development at Interstates 55 and 80 would bring in upscale shopping, restaurants, a hotel and office buildings. The finished development is projected to generate more than \$12 million a year in new tax revenues for the city, schools and other local governments.

"I'm no fool," Fred Butalla said, acknowledging the dollars at stake in the project while voicing his opposition.

Butalla said he and neighbors along nearby Rock Run Drive would lose "a nice, quiet area. It's dark at night. It's secluded. ...This is a big shock to us and a big disappointment to have something like this in our back yard."

'We've been patient'

California-based developer O&S Holdings presented its plan for the Bridge Street Town Centre, which would start with nearly 1.3 million square feet of retail, restaurant and hotel development on 314 acres of land. Another 46 acres at the site is expected to be annexed later this year.

Don Fisher, director of planning for the city, noted that Joliet has rejected previous plans to build industrial buildings at the site.

"We've been patient," Fisher said, adding, "There are few intersections like this in the Midwest let alone in the Chicago area."

Harmful to JJC?

But John Schroeder, a retired faculty member from Joliet Junior College, said he was worried about the impact of a new road that would connect the mall area with Houbolt Road and run along the south edge of the college campus.

"One of the first things you learn as a teacher is that if education is going to take place, you have to have conditions of safety and comfort," Schroeder said. "I don't see this road as serving the college."

Speaking for the plan were John Greuling, chief executive of the Will County Center for Economic Development, and Russ Slinkard, chief executive of the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Greuling said the site will improve quality of life in the Joliet area and increase chances of attracting corporate offices to town.

The Plan Commission vote sends the annexation plan to the city council, which can give final approval when it meets April 1. At that time, the council also would vote on the plan to finance the interchange and new road with sales taxes.

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