

Clermont annexes Black West

Council rezones property for planned 1,000-unit development

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CLERMONT - If the Black West development is approved, it will be part of the City of Clermont.

On Tuesday night, the city annexed and rezoned the property where the 1,000-plus home development is proposed.

The City Council voted 4-1 to annex the 574-acre tract. The annexation will give the city control over how the land is developed.

"Now that they're in the city, they will have to come to us with their exact plans and what they have in mind for the property," said Councilman Keith Mullins.

After the meeting, attorney for Center Lake Properties Cecilia Bonifay said the company is very pleased with the results.

Councilwoman Elaine Renick cast the lone dissenting vote. She said she was concerned about school capacity, but was satisfied that the developer had agreed to school concurrency. Renick said her "no" vote was based mostly on worries about the city's ability to provide utility and public safety services to the area.

When Black West first came before the Clermont City Council in March 2005, rezoning and annexation were denied because of the effect it would have on area schools.

But over the past two years, the applicant has had several meetings with Lake County School District's planning staff to address the school issue.

"We do not foresee any problems with meeting school concurrency," said Bonifay.

Mullins said he is confident of the developer's plans to work closely with the Lake County School Board on school construction.

"We have a good group of people here," said Mullins. "I think it's going to be a definite asset to the community. It will be a nice neighborhood."

Unlike many swaths of land where developments have been proposed, the Black West property was not sold by its former owner to a high bidder. The Carusso family has owned the tract for the past 70 years, and that gave some peace of mind about the plans.

Mullins said it was made evident to the council that the family is not just trying to flip the property for a profit.

Before Clermont could annex the whole parcel, the county had to amend its joint planning agreement with the city. The Lake County Commission agreed to the JPA modifications earlier Tuesday, freeing the council to annex the entire property.

Most of the Black West property, which lies north of Summit Greens along County Road 50 - commonly called "Old 50" - was already part of the county-city joint planning area, which gave the city freedom to annex it. But until Tuesday, 140 acres of it were not.

In addition to the JPA amendment and the annexation, the utility annexation agreement and the comprehensive plan amendment were approved as well.

"Part of the provision with the approved annexation was for a planned unit development for the project that would include both residential and commercial usage," said Bonifay.

The next step for Black West is to bring the details of their development plan to the city council for negotiation.

"I'm sure they'll (Black West) be the subject of many more discussions when we come back with all our plans," said Bonifay.

Renick, who during the meeting said she felt she was out on a lonely limb by herself, said she felt council was basing their decision on what Minneola or the county might do if Clermont did not annex the property.

Renick said she just could not agree with them doing that.

"I really understand the discussions and respect the decision of my fellow council members, but I cannot base my decision on what others may or may not do," said Renick. That's not the way to go and I do not feel right doing that."