
The Apopka Chief

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Town center project is a go

by John Peery
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The Apopka town center project is back on.

After the matter was tabled at the December 5 meeting, the City Council voted Wednesday, December 19, to approve the purchase of additional land for the walkable downtown project at a cost of \$3.65 million. The approval drew applause from many of those who packed the council chambers at City Hall.

Most of the cost is for 12.8 acres owned by the Vose family, Apopka-based developers. The city agreed to pay \$3.4 million to the Voses for property south of Sixth Street at the intersection with Alabama Avenue. In a separate vote, the council approved the purchase of a small parcel of land on McGee Avenue for \$250,000 from Anne Agee.

Commissioner Bill Arrowsmith cast the lone no vote, saying that he wasn't "solidly against this purchase and not solidly for it."

"I'm still looking for some answers," Arrowsmith said. "I was hoping to have more time."

At the December 5 meeting, commissioners Billie Dean and Marilyn Ustler McQueen also expressed serious reservations about the purchase of the Vose property, but voted in favor of the purchase this time. Mayor John H. Land abstained from voting because his home is about a half-block from the Vose property. Two weeks ago, Commissioner Kathy Till also said she had some concerns, but was solidly in favor of the purchase this week. She read a statement of several paragraphs outlining her reasons for voting yes.

Wade Vose, who, along with his mother, Becky Vose, represented the family in the matter, said they were "very excited that the deal got done.

We're also very excited for the city of Apopka, as well," he said.

Vose said that the purchase of the land will allow his family to fund four other projects in the downtown Apopka area. He would not elaborate on those potential projects.

The discussion of the purchase took about 75 minutes, but only one person from the public spoke. Alan Byrd, chairman of the Apopka Area Chamber of Commerce, said he was in favor of the purchase of the land.

John Stainback, principal of SPPRE, the consultant hired by the city to study the town center project, presented financial estimates that showed the city would receive an annual revenue stream of \$2.2 million from the land lease payments by the project developer and property sales taxes.

Two weeks ago, Stainback told the City Council members that purchasing the Vose land was a must.

"We need that land. This town center will not happen without it," he said at the December 5 meeting.

Stainback said the \$3.4 million for the 12 acres was "minuscule" compared to the cost of the project and the revenue it will produce for the city.

In his report to the City Council on December 5, Stainback said the total budget for the development would be \$138 million with \$21 million coming from the city. The funds for the city part would come from lease payments from the developer, and property tax and sales tax revenue generated the project, Stainback said.

The biggest expense for Apopka would be in the building of a new City Hall as the centerpiece of the project.

“We didn’t go into this with a City Hall component (in mind) at all,” said Richard Anderson, the city’s chief administrative officer. Stainback said a city governmental building would help attract people to the project, giving the accompanying restaurants and retail businesses ready-made customers. Also expected to be included in the project is a multiplex movie theater.

If the schedule progresses as Stainback presented, the first phase of the town center will open in September 2010 after 15 months of construction.

The project is proposed for an area just west of the intersection of U.S. Highway 441 and State Road 436. The city currently owns property both north and south of U.S. 441.