

Second rezoning hearing on proposed Austin Gateway Homes scheduled June 10

Written by Marty Randall

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Though their first attempt at rezoning failed last September, a developer and a local property owner have refiled their rezoning petition for property south of West Cherry Street and on South High Street with the Austin Area Plan Commission (AAPC).

Applicants are property owner Tex Murphy of Scottsburg and Indianapolis developer Vop Osili. Property owners who are within 250 feet of the proposed development are receiving notifications of the June 10 hearing, which will be held at 4 p.m. at Austin City Hall. The application and an accompanying file are available for viewing by the public at the office of the Clerk-Treasurer, located at City Hall, during normal business hours, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.

The property is proposed for the site of senior citizen housing, which requires a zoning of R-2 multi-family dwelling. The five addresses, 93 South High Street, 33 West Cherry Street, 51 W. Cherry St. and an empty portion to the east of South High Street as well as Lots 30 and part of Lot 31 in the Austin Original Plat, are currently zoned R-1 single family dwelling. A housing complex as envisioned by Osili is an R-2 complex.

Several adjoining property owners and residents attended last September's public hearing at City Hall to protest the rezoning. Their voices weighed heavily with members of the AAPC, who, with two members absent, voted 3-0 to send the matter to the Austin City Council for final action without a recommendation. Having the last say on the matter, the Council voted 5-0 against the rezoning.

The idea of developing the property into restricted housing for senior citizens was first aired in the community in October, 2011, when the concept of the Austin Gateway project was presented to the public in a special event held on a Sunday afternoon in the old Dollar General Store building.

At that time, the project ambitiously called for not only the senior housing complex south of Cherry St. but also construction north of there of a building to serve as a meeting venue for public events as well as a medical clinic facing State Road 256 West.

That plan would have called for tearing down the buildings that were once the sites of Z&L Furniture and Dollar General Store. The merchandise store has since been renovated into a medical building housing Foundations Family Medicine headed by Dr. William Cooke. The furniture store remains empty.

When a federal grant was in the offing for the residential portion of the project last fall, the AAPC met and debated rezoning the property south of West Cherry St. Only three members could be present at the hearing, which attracted nearby residents. Most of those residents said they were concerned with an R-2 zoned project in the midst of an R-1 neighborhood.

Additionally, some people who spoke at the hearing said they did not feel that the housing complex could effectively prevent other, younger people from living there. Concerns were also voiced over effective policing of the area. Others had concerns over the additional traffic it may cause and the general design of the apartment complex presented.

Members of the AAPC will take a vote on the matter. They may vote to forward a favorable or non-favorable recommendation for final action to the Austin City Council.

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They have a third option, one taken in the 2012 vote, to forward the rezoning application on to the Council with no recommendation.

The Austin City Council, which is scheduled to meet at 5 p.m. on Monday, June 10, is expected to act upon the application during its business meeting.

Both the hearing and the Council's business meeting are open to the public.