

Heated Exchanges, Lawsuit Settled, Glenridge Mixed-Use Development Moving Forward

Six years after Greenstone Properties and MetLife bought Lakeside Office Park, City Council approved rezoning of the property for a mixed-use development, in a split vote decided by Mayor Eva Galambos - and a lawsuit is settled.

Still, perhaps no one is completely happy, as Councilman Gabriel Sterling said, before the vote at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

"Like MetLife said, they've given up millions of dollars in revenue, potentially," Sterling said. "The medical center is still worried about their traffic...It's going to be kind of messy."

Attorneys for Sandy Springs and the property owners met just before trial in May and came up with a compromise. A judge signed a consent order sending the conditions of the compromise to City Council to be voted on.

A Winding Road to Tuesday's Vote

A rezoning request for the property at 5775 and 5795 Glenridge Drive came before City Council in 2007. Original plans included residential living with 300 units, 1.1 million square feet of office space, 50,000 square feet of retail, and a 200-room hotel. Zoning for those plans were denied by City Council in 2008.

Instead in 2009, City Council suggested the property have 520 residential units, 8,000 square feet of free standing restaurant space, 770,000 square feet of office space and a 42,000 square foot accessory commercial building. But ultimately rezoning was later denied.

In the meantime, nearby neighbors' concerns grew over the physical impact the development could have on Glenridge Drive and the increase in traffic that the project will bring. And folks at the Glenridge Medical Center worry that traffic will become hazardous to people at their building.

The Compromise

Last May, attorneys for both sides agreed to nearly the same conditions suggested by City Council in 2009, but with a reduction in office space. The plans include 520 residential units, 8,000 square feet of free standing restaurant space, 700,000 square feet of offices space and a 42,000 square foot accessory commercial building.

"Because a proposed compromise in 2009/10 had fallen through, plaintiffs counsel insisted that this be done by consent order," said Henderson, Sandy Springs counsel. "The judge signed the consent order requiring

the proposal be re-heard by City Council and that's why we are here tonight."

Heated Exchanges Before the Vote

"So you bought that based on a bunch of political decisions that could be influenced by everyone in the neighborhood." Tibby DeJulio.

Before Mayor Galambos' deciding vote, Councilmembers Karen Meinzen McEnerny, Tibby DeJulio and Chip Collins voted against rezoning; and John Paulson, Dianne Fries and Gabriel Sterling voted for it.

Plaintiff attorney **Richard Robbins** was admonished by DeJulio after he stated that MetLife's initial \$62 million purchase was based on Sandy Springs' Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Plan. Robbins said the 400,000 square foot reduction in office space meant MetLife would not receive \$10 million in rent annually.

DeJulio: "You mentioned you purchased the property in 2006 based upon a land use plan that wasn't adopted until 2007. But we'll let that go. [What you said is not true.] And you have to admit it's not true. But we'll go along with that."

Robbins: "Am I to say anything or just stand here."

DeJulio: "You're to just stand there."

Robbins said he believed the land use plan was developed and passed in 2006 and revised in 2007.

He added, "...We had extensive discussions with your staff as to the proposed use of this property, that was going to be voted on by your staff."

DeJulio: "So you bought that based on a bunch of political decisions that could be influenced by everyone in the neighborhood."

Moments later the Mayor interrupted, "I don't think that we need to be arguing with our witnesses.

Fries added, "I'd like to apologize for my colleague's grilling of you. You don't deserve that. As everybody can see this is a difficult situation for all of us..."

Indeed, about 20 residents stood at neighbor Doug Falciglia's request during public comment on concerns over the impact on the neighborhood. The neighbors want a transitional 100-foot buffer.

"Over time we anticipate that development will continue along Glenridge, and we would be very fearful of seeing residences or apartments all the way up to the park," Falciglia said.