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Lancaster annexes Dallas Logistics Hub land, approves downtown plan

Lancaster: Annexation of project land, downtown plan move forward

By Elizabeth Langton

LANCASTER – The city expanded its borders by 658 acres this week by annexing part of the 6,000-acre Dallas Logistics Hub project.

The annexation involved eight tracts between the city's northeast boundaries and the cities of Wilmer and Hutchins. The Allen Group, which is spearheading the development of the mammoth inland trade port and distribution center, owns the properties.

The logistics hub represents a huge opportunity for often-overlooked areas of southern Dallas County, city spokeswoman Ciciely Hickmon said.

"It's going to be great for us," she said. "The economic impact will be amazing."

The logistics hub land is divided almost equally among Lancaster, Dallas, Hutchins and Wilmer. Two rail lines and three highways converge near the site, which is adjacent to the Lancaster Municipal Airport and the proposed Loop 9.

When the hub is completed in 30 to 40 years, officials expect it to employ 30,000 workers and add \$2.5 billion to the cities' property tax bases.

The Lancaster council approved a rezoning of the newly annexed area plus 1,262 acres owned by The Allen Group that was already within the city limits. The zoning was changed from agricultural and light industrial to a planned development district crafted specifically for logistics hub uses.

The council will adopt zoning ordinances for the properties later.

Downtown plan

In other action, the council approved a master plan for the city's downtown area, which officials hope will benefit as the hub project attracts more businesses and residents.

The new regulations apply to a Downtown District, generally bounded by Fourth Street, Hall's Branch Creek, Redbud Lane and Keller Branch Creek. City officials envision a pedestrian-oriented area with a mix of residential, civic and retail uses.

City officials started work on the downtown plan more than a year ago. The council collected comments from residents at several town hall meetings, and outside consultants drafted the plan.

The guidelines regulate parking, building setbacks, landscaping, sidewalks, signage, architecture and other elements. Owners must abide by the rules as they redevelop or renovate their properties.

Council member Clyde Hairston said he is eager to see a new downtown Lancaster emerge.

"I'm ready to go down there and buy a pair of shoes or go to a restaurant with my family," he said. "I'm a big fan of downtown."

'No' to business park

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While the council unanimously approved the logistics hub items, it rejected a business park planned for 80 acres near Interstate 20 and Houston School Road.

The Planning and Zoning Commission had recommended denial because the project didn't fit standards in the city's development code. Because of the commission's vote, developer White Rock Commercial needed five of six council votes to prevail.

The council vote was 3-3, although two residents spoke in favor of the project and the developers

adjusted it after the planning commission's rejection so that it met approval from the consultant who drafted the area's development code.

"We need this for this area of town," resident Ellen Clark said. "We need the jobs; we need the visibility; we need the notoriety."

White Rock Commercial officials could not be reached for comment.