

Bend City Council Votes to Move Forward on Juniper Ridge

by K_Guice

In a five-two vote, the Bend City council voted Wednesday in favor of moving forward with the much debated, 1,500-acre Juniper Ridge mixed-use site with a key amendment.

Recently, area business leaders had been stepping up asking the city to slow down, stating concerns that if the city moves too fast they could potentially lose profits and waste tax payer's money.

"We were asking them to rethink the MOU (memorandum of understanding)," said Mike Schmidt, the president and CEO of the Bend Chamber of Commerce.

The MOU is the agreement between the City of Bend and Juniper Ridge Partners LLC that was voted in favor of on August 16.

"We are disappointed," Schmidt said. He felt the city should open the bidding process back up since the scope of the project had changed dramatically from its inception.

"It was 504 acres of light industrial land and now it is a 1500-acre mixed-used project where the dominant feature is 600 acres of housing," Schmidt said.

Businesses were coming to the chamber from California, Washington, Portland, and Seattle. According to

Schmidt, they all reportedly were interested in bidding on the expanded project.

However, Schmidt says he would have liked to have seen a preference given to local businesses on this project and hopes to see that in the future.

“There is an Oregon statute that allows for a city to give local preference points when it is evaluating projects,” Schmidt said.

While Schmidt is displeased that Bend businesses won’t get that option; he is pleased with the amendment made to the agreement.

“They struck a current section in the MOU that would have been a kind of first right of refusal for the developer for up to six months after the urban growth boundary has been expanded and gone through that process,” Schmidt said.

In addition, an amendment allows for the city to approve 75 percent of the spending. According to Schmidt, the developer now has to get approval prior to spending money.

“So, all of the binding elements of the contract are basically gone and we now move forward to the next phase,” Schmidt said. “Which is the master planning and the development agreement that will be negotiated in maybe six to eight months.”

There is still a lot of work to be done with the project even after this master plan and that is where Schmidt hopes to see more local businesses get involved.

“We have good local people here that could do an excellent job for the city,” he said. “I think as we move towards the development agreement we will continue to press for a local hiring preference.”

Schmidt says as he understands the agreement, at least 75 percent of the residential land and 75 percent of the light industrial land will be sold off to others to develop.

“That is when local builders, developers and architects will have the ability to show their stuff,” Schmidt said.

In the meantime, everyone is waiting for the market study that will look at, among other things, if Juniper Ridge can attract companies that pay family wage jobs in Bend.

“That is the cornerstone of the vision the city has for this project,” Schmidt said.

So, despite calls to slow the process, the city is moving full-steam ahead. “It is clear the city does not want to slow down,” he said.

“We need to work with them on this process so that their dream and the economic reality we are all hoping for comes true,” he added.

Schmidt met with Mayor Bill Friedman on Wednesday before the city council meeting to look at how the city and business could work together.

“We looked at putting together a management board that would look at the financial accountability side, stake holder side and community involvement,” he said.

In the end, Schmidt says everyone has to work together so everyone can win. “Our goal is just to move forward and make the best of the project,” he said.