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City Council backs site to build business school

Leaders support deal to sell land for homes

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City Council voted unanimously Monday to donate one acre valued at \$650,000 in Renaissance Park for the University of South Carolina Upstate to construct a new business school downtown.

Council approved first reading on the ordinance Monday and must hold a public hearing and final reading before the ordinance is enacted.

City Development Director Julie Franklin said the memorandum of understanding between the city and the university is the "first step." In return for the city's commitment, the university must agree to \$3.9 million in capital contributions for a public parking garage and public infrastructure. About \$3 million would be used for the garage construction and \$900,000 would be applied to public infrastructure improvements.

The university also will pay a pro-rated cost of the operation and maintenance expenses associated with its use of 250 parking garage spaces. City Manager Mark Scott said about 700 to 750 parking spaces are planned for the garage, but that number could increase. The city plans to have pedestrian-oriented activities surrounding the garage, which would likely be located behind the school and Chapman Cultural Center and could be used by others that locate in the 17-acre parcel and those already there, including the Marriott at Renaissance Park and the Montgomery building.

Franklin said she soon will present a development agreement to council that will outline the specific

commitments of the city and the school with a time frame for the project.

The school is tentatively scheduled to open in December 2009. School leaders must present their proposal, including business and academic plans, to the university president by Dec. 1 so board members can consider them at their Dec. 17 meeting.

In other business, council approved first reading on an ordinance to allow Scott to enter into an option agreement for the city to sell about 17 acres on Wofford Street to the Spartanburg Housing Authority. The authority is applying for a \$12 million Hope VI grant to build affordable rental and homeownership units in the area known as Midtowne Heights. The housing authority plans to construct 80 units along Wofford Street, with 48 rental and 32 homeownership units. Also included in the application are plans to rehabilitate the Main Street Motel and Woodworth Homes.

The housing authority will learn by summer 2008 whether its grant application was approved. Councilwoman Linda Dogan voted against the motion, saying she has concerns about the way former Tobias Hartwell residents were "misplaced" outside the city limits and never returned during the rehabilitation of those apartments, part of the first Hope VI grant awarded to the city in 1996. City Housing Services Manager Wes Corrothers said public meetings are scheduled in the community that will address those questions.

Corrothers also said that plans for the property will take into consideration homes that aren't slated for redevelopment.

The first public hearing on the matter will be held at 6 p.m. Oct. 11 at Bunton Institute CME, located at 500 Wofford St. Community residents are encouraged to attend.

Council unanimously approved first reading on an ordinance to rezone about 15 acres near Converse Heights from R-15 single-family residential district to R-8 general residential planned development district. Johnson Development plans to develop the parcel into 40 lots for single-family homes.

The homes will start at 2,300 square feet, and the lots will be large enough to accommodate homes in excess of 4,000 square feet, said Ben Graves, president of the multi-family division for Johnson Development.

Planning Director Stephanie Monroe said the new zoning district will allow for rear alleyways and reduced lot size for higher density.

There had been some concerns from residents near the future development, named Carrington, on the safety of a nearby bridge and the impact increased traffic volume would have on the existing roads.

A city engineer said the Norfolk Southern-owned bridge meets state and railroad standards and is structurally sound but would benefit from reinforcing rails along the bridge and cutting overgrowth. A private engineering firm concluded that the traffic impact on Canterbury and Riverside drives would be minimal since most residents would use the Woodburn Road entrance.

Graves said Allison Ramsey Architects would develop architectural standards for the development, which wouldn't be a gated community.

In 10 to 15 years, the transition from Converse Heights into Carrington would be seamless, Graves said.

Angela Viney, director of the Spartanburg office of Upstate Forever, spoke in favor of Carrington. No one spoke in opposition. "We're deeply grateful to the vision this represents for our city, and we're excited," Mayor Bill Barnet said after the motion to rezone the property was approved.

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