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PRESS RELEASE

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City Adjusts Scope of Land Needed for New Water Plant

GRANTS PASS – The Grants Pass City Council approved a new resolution declaring a public need for acquisition of property for a new water treatment plant at their meeting Jan. 15. The new resolution supersedes a previous resolution adopted March 20, 2019, and changes the scope of the property required for building the new plant.

“It’s more accurate to replace that one with this one,” said City Attorney Mark Bartholomew.

The previous resolution identified a 16.94-acre tract at 695 SE “J” St. “as the ideal location considering land acquisition and water treatment plant construction costs. The new resolution reduces the request to a proposed area of the property which encompasses only 9.97 acres of the property.

“The goal is to be as accommodating as possible,” said Bartholomew.

The current plant is located on a parcel that is 3.3 acres. The actual “footprint” of the plant is smaller, but room is needed for ancillary processes, yard piping, parking, and other operational aspects. The majority of the current property has pipe or conduit duct bank running through it, said City Manager Aaron Cubic.

The new configuration of 9.97 acres will allow the new facility to include its own backwash handling facilities which will include a backwash and stormwater pond.

“This will likely take up over an acre alone, if not more,” said Cubic.

Additional room is required to ensure that the plant can be enlarged at a future date.

“We need to ensure adequate space for future growth. To acquire minimum lot size for current

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operations would add a lot of cost to future users,” he said.

“This issue cannot be overemphasized, if we cannot construct future plant expansions without utilizing other parcels for construction activities or have enough room to excavate next to structures without encroaching on the Parkway, we will be back in the same position that we are today, unable to expand or re-construct without impacting plant operations,” Cubic said.

Security is another reason additional room is needed. The current plant is considered vulnerable due to its accessibility. The added room will allow for numerous security measures which will help to deter any future security concerns.

Another acre is required for stormwater management and plant overflow storage that the current facility does not have. An external perimeter road is something else the existing plant does not have and is needed for chemical deliveries and solids haul off, said Cubic.

“The latest land option provides minimal impact on the landscaping business at its current location and allows this service to the community to continue,” he said.

The property is owned by the Ausland family, operators of Copeland Sand and Gravel. The city has been in negotiations with the Auslands since early last year, but those negotiations have hit a stand still.

“We have made an offer and we have not heard back,” Bartholomew said.

Oregon law requires the city to declare to a public need for the property prior to commencing with any eminent domain proceedings, but Bartholomew was clear in stating that the new resolution does not prevent continued negotiations from taking place.

Councilors Joel King and Valerie Lovelace questioned Bartholomew about the process of moving forward with eminent domain should a reasonable deal fail to materialize between the Auslands and the city.

Bartholomew said the city was required to wait at least 40 days after an offer was made based on a recent appraisal of the property, before moving forward with additional procedures. The city obtained a new appraisal of the identified portion of the property in December, he said.

Speaking at public comment on the item, Steve Ausland expressed his family had two different plans for the property. One plan included continuing the business operations that currently exist at the site, the other plan proposed selling the land to a large retail outlet, he said.

The city’s desire to use a portion of the property would “eliminate its use for a big box outlet,” said Ausland.

“You might as well ignore this (resolution) because you already have to take the whole property,” Ausland said.

City councilors disagreed.

“I see this as an appropriate step. The city has determined that we do not need the entire property,” said Councilor DJ Faszler.

“I see this as a good compromise as far as I can see,” said Councilor Dennis Roler.

“I agree that this is a great compromise,” said Councilor Clint Scherf.

Bartholomew’s presentation included projections of cost increases the city will incur while the process to acquire the land continues. His projection is an increase of \$267,000 per month, and Councilor Roler said city consultants have determined that moving the location could add as much as \$20 million to the price of the facility.

Councilor Valerie Lovelace spoke of the impending need to replace the current aging water plant, which she identified as the oldest existing water plant still in operation in the state of Oregon.

“It will not last forever, and it has taken us eight years to get to this point,” said Lovelace.

Council President Tyler Flaming was optimistic that a deal could be reached with the Auslands for the purchase of the required property.

“I hope that through these negotiations we can reach an agreement everyone can feel good about,” said Flaming.

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