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FEATURED

Aldermen align with city of Franklin staff, many residents in opposing plans for Brownland Farm

By John McBryde
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The Franklin City Hall auditorium was standing-room only Tuesday night, and many more attendees were in the lobby observing the BOMA meeting.

Photo by John McBryde

One month after Franklin aldermen had seemed to be in favor of a proposed rezoning request and development plan for the Brownland Farm property on Hillsboro Road, they did a complete 180 Tuesday night and voted unanimously to bring the project to a halt.

With a motion made from Ward 2 Alderman Matt Brown to deny the rezoning request and the plan for development, board members each had their say before voting 8-0 to approve denial. The vote, which followed public comment from more than 60 people who were mostly speaking out against the property proposal, put an end to the process that has stretched for nearly three years. (X)

Brown made the same motion at the March 22 Board of Mayor and Aldermen meeting, but it was struck down 6-2

(X)

“When I made that first motion back in March and was defeated 2-6, I didn’t have huge expectations [for Tuesday’s results],” said Brown, whose ward includes the Brownland Farm property. “But I was hoping that the process would play out. ...

“Also, I think we all took a really hard look at the connection between Envision Franklin and the ordinances, and while I will acknowledge with other people there are some gaps in that, I don’t dismiss it out of hand as it has been in the past. And I think last night it was properly appreciated for what the land-use plan is.”

Envision Franklin, which was adopted in 2017 by the city’s Municipal Planning Commission, is a guide that directs future development favorably to Franklin’s quality of life. It’s been the basis for why city of Franklin staff and the planning commission have continuously recommended disapproval of the Brownland Farm project.

“In the judgment of the planning commission and of [the city’s] professional staff, this development does not comply with the city’s adopted land-use plan, Envision Franklin,” City Administrator Eric Stuckey said.

The applicants — Greg Gamble of Gamble Design Collaborative and Kevin Estes of Land Solutions Company, who have been representing the landowners, Robin and Michelle Anderton — had requested to rezone the 234-acre horse farm from Agriculture District and Civic Institutional District to Planned District.

“In front of you is a plan that reflects my client’s willingness to build consensus with you and city staff, as well as the community,” Gamble told aldermen. “The plan has a wide mix of housing, great community, open space areas, improvements to the environment. It’s a plan that is better tomorrow than it is today. We believe this is the right plan and the best plan for Brownland.”

However, scores of residents have been disagreeing throughout the process. On top of concerns expressed about traffic, school capacities and emergency outlets from the property, chief pushback has been about threats of flooding. The Harpeth River runs through the property, and as shown from rather significant floods in recent years, it’s prone for overflowing.

“No question that the Brownland Farm property is very difficult parcel to develop because of the floodplain and the circuitous route of the Harpeth River,” Franklin Mayor Ken Moore said. “I’ve visited out there, I’ve listened to the developer. I’ve worked to understand, as best I could, what they’re talking about as far as the floodplain. ...

“This is a significant policy deviation and I’m concerned it has a long-term implication for our growth. We don’t have to develop every square inch of Franklin and we don’t have to shoehorn a project in a parcel, but rather we should make sure the land dictates what goes there.”

The full BOMA meeting lasted about 3½ hours. Visit the [city of Franklin’s Facebook page](#) to view it.
