

From The City Wire

Residents' limited concerns about Downtown Rogers Plan unfounded; rather Plan a positive for Property Owners

By Rose Ann Pearce - July 7, 2015

The Downtown Master Plan for the revitalization of downtown Rogers is an illustration of what could be done in the downtown area, not a recommendation to secure private property, said Scott Polikov, president of Gateway Planning Group of Texas.

Key recommendations in the master plan are a major rezoning of downtown properties to encourage more residential living; a transformation of alleys into lighted walkways for evening walks; and a transformation of the city park into a plaza for community events, featuring a portable stage that can accommodate different size performers from bands to symphonies.

The plan also ties into the Lake Atalanta improvements and a bike park in development.

The plan creates four districts within the downtown area identified as the Water Tower District, Victory Row, Frisco Front and the Walnut-Poplar corridors. Each of the districts would have different zoning to provide residents and visitors with different experiences.

Polikov spoke Tuesday (July 7) during a Rogers Planning Commission public hearing during which residents, like Mike Slaughter of Elizabeth Ark., who expressed concern about the city's use of eminent domain to take over private property to implement the plan.

"I don't know how you will execute the plan when you have private property owners who are not interested in eminent domain," said Slaughter, who owns property at 201 E. Walnut St.

He leases the building to a tire business. His concern, he said, was because a building was shown on the map that was different from the building he owns.

"I don't want to impede progress but it looks like the property I own is recommended to have another building put there," Slaughter said.

William Fisher also expressed concern about the cost and who would pay to implement the plan.

"The plan won't go anywhere until you get rid of the stench from the chicken plant," a reference to a plant owned and operated by Tyson Foods. Tyson has a chicken hatchery at 212 E. Elm St., east of the downtown area.

Rogers resident Bob Meehan compared Tyson to "an elephant in the room," calling it an "abomination," adding the plant was an issue that "needs to be addressed before that area has any continuity."

Meehan also included in the former Peachtree nursing home in the Lane Hotel building in his comments, saying that should be updated with condominiums or torn down. The hotel was sold last week to KLS Leasing, a group with ties to the Walton family for \$1.6 million. The new owners have announced no plans.

"The plan has no recommendation to secure private property through eminent domain," Polikov said. "I want to underscore that. The plan doesn't require anyone to go out of business and doesn't recommend any business be closed." The plan does suggest "opportunities for investment and enhancement," he added.

Polikov said the Gateway team met with the Tyson plant leadership who expressed interest in remaining in the downtown area because of the number of local residents who are employed at the plant. But, he added, the property could be

rezoned for some of mixed use to take effect if Tyson leaves the area.

Steve Glass, director of transportation planning for the city, said the costs would be paid from bond proceeds, grants, street fund reserves and general fund reserves although there were no cost estimates at the present time.

“No public money will be spent on private property,” Glass said.

The master plan has been in the works for at least a year and was only unveiled last month. The complete plan is detailed in a 152-page document found at [this link](#). Polikov encouraged residents to read the report and ask questions.

At the conclusion, the audience was asked with a show of hands to indicate their support of the plan. A majority of the estimated 85 in attendance raised their hands.

The Planning Commission recommended the plan be approved by the City Council. The next hearing is scheduled July 14 at 6:30 p.m. by the City Council. Council approval is expected later this month.