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Blackhawk annexation reaches council

NEWS, TOP STORIES

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Galena Village Council had first readings on the annexation of Blackhawk Golf Course at its meeting Monday.

There were two forms of legislation regarding the golf course. First was a resolution authorizing the pre-annexation agreement between the land owners Groezinger Golf Enterprises and John D. Wright, developer Blackhawk Endeavors, and the village. Second was an ordinance accepting the annexation of 260.56 acres from the land owners into the village. Currently, the property is in Berkshire Township, adjacent to the village.

If it were to be developed, 220 acres of land west of Galena and bounded by Dustin and Plumb roads, Old 3C Highway, and state Route 3, would be developed into a total of “1,029 new residences combined with other commercial and mixed uses,” states the zoning report. The remaining 40 acres may be used for a school.

The legislation will go through three readings, with council voting at the third reading.

Solicitor Ken Molnar said the pre-annexation agreement was given to legal firm Bricker & Eckler for analysis, and he didn’t know what was in it. He said the agreement may include incentives or concessions wanted by the developer. This prompted a discussion regarding what role, if any, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) had in the agreement. It was said that if any of the parties were not happy, the development could be canceled.

It was explained to those in attendance that the development is currently on three separate tracks — pre-annexation, annexation, and zoning — and the failure of any one would end the development. It was stated the zoning would be discussed further at a public hearing in September.

Monday’s meeting was half of the time of the contentious five-hour Planning & Zoning meeting on Aug. 21, where the Commission approved the zoning recommendation with six conditions to council by a 3-2 vote. Monday’s meeting only filled half of village hall, which was at capacity last week. The parties representing the developer — The Champion Companies, attorneys Kephart Fisher LLC and planner MKSK — were not on hand like they were last week.

However, like last week, those residents that did speak on Monday were all in opposition to the development. There was cheers and clapping after most speakers, and signs that read “STOP HIGH DENSITY DEVELOPMENT” were held up.

For an hour, there was a lot of back and forth of questions and comments. Among the comments were disappointment with the way the development was pushed through; it would be “inviting crime” because of rentals; the “pure greed” of some parties; “money talks”; the addition of possibly 3,000 people to quadruple the size of Galena to “be the slum of Sunbury”; “we potentially opened a Pandora’s box”; and “it makes money but it doesn’t make sense.” Some said they had moved from communities such as Dublin to live in a quaint village, and the development “will not get 25-year-old millennials from the Short North.”

Councilwoman and Zoning Commission member Kathy Krupa said she was requesting an appeal, because “it was a lot of pressure on us” to vote on Aug. 21. She also said she wasn’t aware of the mixed use of the property, but Mayor and Commission member Tom Hopper said “that’s what you voted for” at a prior meeting.

Hopper clarified a statement he made last week that no one wanted the 18-hole Blackhawk to remain. He said three bidders for the property had said they would not keep the course. As for himself, he loved the golf course. In addition, “Galena did not ask for the golf course to be annexed.” He also reminded people that the Estates at Blackhawk subdivision, across from the golf course, “was extremely controversial when it came out.”

“There’s a lot of misinformation floating around,” Hopper said, such as that a sewer line would be running into Hoover Reservoir. Hopper also said he has never had a one-on-one meeting with any developer; he was not negotiating a deal for TIFs; and “there’s no deal in place.”

He was then asked to explain a comment he made last week about the commission’s recommendation being “what’s best for Galena.”

“Planning and zoning commissions are regulatory commissions,” Hopper said. “By the way, the village has never been sued for a zoning issue, and I think we’ve had some pretty nice developments come out of it, including developments that most of you live in.

“They (the developers) come in with a plan, there’s a give and take,” he continued. “That’s why there’s divergences allowed — there isn’t anything bad about a divergence as long as it’s reasonable and it fits, it’s just part of working out the plan. If their application for the most part fits the (zoning) rules, the law (Ohio Revised Code), and are within the (village’s) general vision (the Master Plan, which) changes over time,” conditional zoning approval would be granted.

“Now everybody wants to build apartments — not my favorite thing, but you have to look at that overall and vote my good conscience,” Hopper said, “and I got basically (pilloried) for voting my conscience.

“I believe as a regulator, they met their statutory burden that they had to do to prove that, and therefore, under the rules of zoning, I have to vote to approve it, because that’s what’s in the best interest of the village. If I don’t do that, I believe I place the village at risk for legal action. Whether I like it or want it, is not part of zoning law. I don’t necessarily like that that’s not part of zoning law, but I just know from having done this for more than 30 years, that will not hold up.”

A couple of those who spoke at the council meeting did say they were being educated about the legislative process.