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Folsom's push south takes shape

By Walter Yost - Bee Staff Writer

Published 12:00 am PDT Wednesday, June 13, 2007

The city of Folsom on Tuesday took a major step toward its long-sought goal of moving south of Highway 50, unveiling a detailed plan that would add up to 30,000 residents.

The proposed plan to develop 3,500 acres envisions nearly 12,000 new residential units and more than 7,500 new jobs. Also included is a 100-acre site designated for a potential regional mall. Folsom had about 69,000 residents in 2006, according to state Department of Finance figures.

City officials said their plans, subject to extensive public review and environmental scrutiny, will retain more than 30 percent of the area, including prairie and oak woodlands, as undeveloped open space.

The remainder will be divided among offices, parks, schools and shops. The acreage is owned by seven landowners, including partnerships that include Angelo K. Tsakopoulos, the largest land developer in Sacramento.

The annexation is expected to take more than two years and city leaders don't anticipate being able to start developing the area until January 2010 at the earliest.

"This is the first step in what will be a very comprehensive and involved public process to follow," said City Manager Kerry Miller.

A potential obstacle is finding a new water supply to serve the area -- a condition for annexation required by a 2004 city ballot measure and earlier agreements with the county and the Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO.

Miller said Tuesday the prospects for securing water are "very good," although he didn't elaborate on where the water would come from.

Mike McKeever, executive director of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, said that based on his staff's preliminary review of the land-use plan, "our first impressions are all positive."

He said the plan does a good job of protecting natural resources, providing a mixture of housing and jobs and encouraging non-auto trips with its emphasis on walking and biking trails and public transit.

However, Folsom resident Bob Fish, a longtime opponent of development south of Highway 50, maintains that most Folsom residents actually oppose development in the area but the city hasn't given them the opportunity to make a "yes" or "no" decision.

Fish, a leader of Folsom Citizens for Responsible Growth, said he and his supporters plan to put a measure on the ballot giving voters that opportunity.

Fish also said he doubts that the city will be able to secure a new water supply for the area, given current drought conditions.

Folsom officials have wanted to annex the land south of Highway 50 since the early 1990s. In June 2001, LAFCO defined the city's sphere of influence as the land bounded by Highway 50 to the north, Prairie City Road to the west, White Rock Road to the south, and the El Dorado County line to the east. The land is part of unincorporated Sacramento County

Three years later, nearly 70 percent of Folsom voters approved Measure W, which imposed various requirements on the city if it chose to expand south of Highway 50.

The requirements included: 30 percent of the area had to be kept in open space; the city had to find a

water source that didn't tap its existing supplies; and existing Folsom residents wouldn't have to pay for new schools.

Earlier this year, voters in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District approved a \$750 million bond to build new schools in the Folsom and Rancho Cordova areas south of Highway 50, with new residents footing the bill.

During the Measure W campaign, opponents of the measure, including Fish, feared that the city would claim that a "yes" was a mandate to build south of Highway 50.

Miller said Tuesday he believes the land-use plan for the area "reflects the meticulous community vision of this property."

City Councilman Steve Miklos, who sits on the Sacramento Area Council of Governments board of directors, said the area is "the No. 1 piece of property" in the Sacramento region best able to accommodate growth.

With SACOG anticipating between 800,000 and 1 million people moving into the Sacramento region over the next 30 years, the agency has identified the area immediately south of Highway 50 from Folsom as a logical place for urban expansion.

If the planned development occurs, it could put Folsom in competition with its fast-growing neighbor to the west -- Rancho Cordova -- for new upscale retail businesses.

Approximately 340 acres of the area is designated for commercial/retail under the plan. John Hodgson, a development consultant who represents the area's landowners, said there also is an option to build a regional mall along the Highway 50 corridor.

While Rancho Cordova Vice Mayor Linda Budge said she's a longtime supporter of the annexation, she said "we'd hate to lose retailers to Folsom."

Budge said that as Folsom and Rancho Cordova grow physically closer, it's also important that planners from both cities work together in places where there are shared boundaries, such as Prairie City Road.

Folsom has scheduled an informational open house on the land use plan from 5 to 7:30 p.m. June 28 at the Folsom Community Center, 52 Natoma Street.

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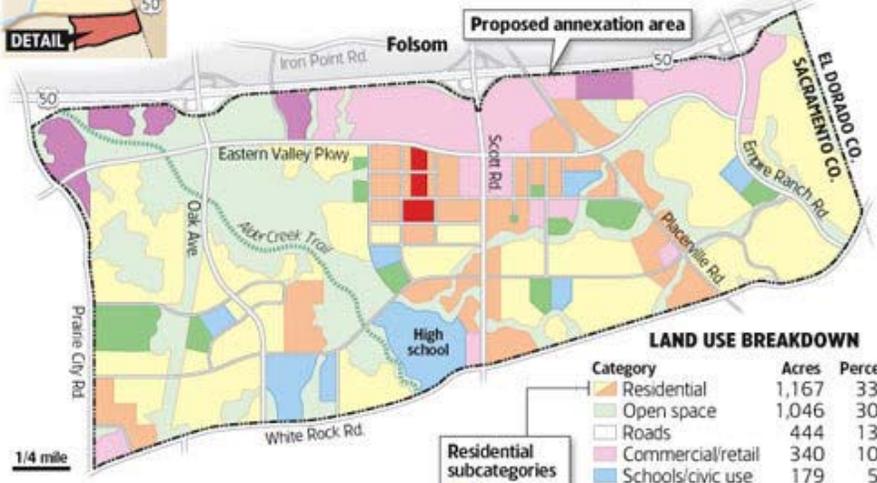
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Folsom expansion plan

The city of Folsom seeks to annex and develop 3,500 acres south of Highway 50. The city envisions nearly 12,000 new residential units, 25,000 to 30,000 residents and more than 7,500 new jobs in the area.



LAND USE BREAKDOWN

| Category | Acres | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Residential | 1,167 | 33% |
| Open space | 1,046 | 30% |
| Roads | 444 | 13% |
| Commercial/retail | 340 | 10% |
| Schools/civic use | 179 | 5% |
| Parks | 165 | 5% |
| Office | 106 | 3% |
| Mixed use | 41 | 1% |

| Residential subcategories |
|---------------------------|
| Single family |
| Multifamily |

Source: City of Folsom
Sacramento Bee/Nathaniel Levine

1/4 mile