

## **Brisbane Baylands economics up for review: Officials to examine financial feasibility of massive residential, commercial project**

By Austin Walsh Daily Journal Staff Apr 6, 2017

Assuring a potentially transformative commercial and residential development along the Baylands is not a drain on the city's resources will be the focus of an upcoming examination by Brisbane officials.

The Brisbane City Council is slated during a Thursday, April 6, study session to address the economic impacts brought by a proposal to construct 4,000 new homes and 7 million square feet of commercial space.

The discussion is one of the final scheduled in a series of similar smaller sessions before the City Council is slated to begin formally vetting Universal Paragon Corporation's entire proposal later this summer.

Brisbane Community Development Director John Swiecki said a primary concern for officials ahead of the upcoming discussion will be assuring the project is financially feasible.

"The number one issue is that the city benefits, or is not at risk, from this project," he said. "How does the city assure that objective is achieved? That is clearly the top-of-mind issue."

An economic analysis of the proposal projects the city stands to take in between \$1 million and \$8 million annually in tax revenue through the project, depending on the amenities constructed alongside the homes and businesses.

The wide variance swings according to whether the development includes space for hotels and entertainment centers, according to the report, which could be an economic draw for the city.

Swiecki said while officials can try to protect the city's financial interest through applying land use and zoning regulations, they remain at the mercy of potential economic shifts over the nearly three decades likely needed to build the project.

“The problem with that is that the city can reserve land, but it is not guaranteed the market will respond to that wish or demand,” he said.

Though officials are expected to make a decision on the project this summer, nearly a decade after it was initially introduced, Swiecki has said he expects the initiative will likely go to voters for final approval.

As part of the upcoming discussion, officials will also address a variety of efforts designed to help pay for the early phases of infrastructure and staging work. Among the initiatives addressed in the financial analysis are potentially establishing a special tax district in the area, relying on developer contributions or considering taxes such as those generating revenue for the city when new construction begins.

Another potential economic asset to the city is preserving a portion of the 660-acre site for a solar farm, according to a city report summarizing recommendations from the city's Planning Commission.

“By reducing the development footprint and incorporating a large-scale solar generation facility ... the commission felt there was an opportunity to reduce both infrastructure needs and ongoing operations and maintenance costs of development while still accommodating economically viable uses,” according to the report.

Swiecki too has suggested previously he sensed community members may feel the project is too large to garner the voter support likely needed to ultimately approve the proposal.

Though the city has not spent a significant amount of time examining the financial feasibility of the solar farm proposal, Swiecki said there is considerable community interest in the initiative.

“I think there are a lot of people in town who are very interested about that being an appropriate end use for the property,” he said.

Though officials have done their best to set the stage for a discussion examining the economic impacts tied to the project, Swiecki said it is reasonable to assume councilmembers may have more questions suitable for future meetings.

“This project tends to beget more and more questions and concerns,” he said.

Looking ahead at the variety of issues associated with the development, Swiecki said a primary concern for officials will be assuring the project’s financial viability.

“Making sure this project pays for itself and benefits the city is first and foremost,” he said.

The Brisbane City Council meets in a study session 6 p.m. Thursday, April 6, in the Community Meeting Room at City Hall, 50 Park Place.

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