

## Vision Shapes Future of Brownsboro Area

February 26, 2009, The Oldham Era

By John Foster

One group's vision for the Brownsboro area took a step toward reality Tuesday as the Oldham County Planning and Zoning Commission approved the Brownsboro Master Plan.

While some residents said the plan restricts their ability to develop land as they'd like, proponents said it isn't regulation, but rather a series of suggestions and incentives for property owners to develop land in a certain way.

The plan has been in the works since June 2006, when a public meeting kicked off the process. Since then, about 20 residents met monthly to create a plan for what they want the community to look like over the next 20 years. Brownsboro is the first community to create such a plan as required by the Oldham County master plan. The master plan calls for eight such plans for various areas throughout the county.

The plan will serve as a reference for planners when deciding whether to approve zoning changes or developments within the Brownsboro area, Oldham County Planning and Development Director Louise Allen said.

The plan includes incentives to developers to build a subdivision with landscape buffers, open space and walking and horse or bike paths. The plan recommends that if a developer does these things, they could be rewarded with the ability to develop the land at a higher density than the zoning allows, potentially creating a more profitable development. The plan also recommends higher density development be constrained to the town of Brownsboro and the Norton Commons area.

A wish list of items are included in the plan as things to be encouraged, but not mandated, such as new homes having an historic design style, avoiding a manicured appearance – instead encouraging the planting of various trees and bushes, and encouraging four-board horse fences and split rail fences along scenic corridors. Sen. Ernie Harris, a Brownsboro resident who worked on the plan, said he originally had concerns the plan could decrease his property value and restrict his right to develop his 200-acre farm.

“I don’t know when my farm’s going to be developed,” he said, “but it’s going to be developed whether it’s in my lifetime or my kids’.”

But during the process of meetings and brainstorming sessions, the plan won him over. He thinks the plan is a good step toward maintaining the rural character of the area without too many restrictions. He likes that it is incentive-driven instead of mandate-driven.

County attorney John Fendley spoke on behalf of his brother, who owns 200 acres in Brownsboro, and called the plan an unrealistic utopian vision.

“To me, it’s a nightmare,” he said.

He said his family has been in Oldham County since about 1830.

“It was poor farmland then, it’s poor farmland now,” he said. “Probably the only profitable thing to do is put houses on it.”

And if a landowner wants to sell land, make some money and retire, he should be able to develop it as he sees fit. If he wants to build homes for poor or middle-class people, he should be able to do that. Instead, local government makes it difficult, Fendley said. “I don’t believe in government telling me how to do anything and everything,” he said.

Commissioner Joe McWilliams said he’s a property rights type of guy, but he’s been to various places throughout the country that lack good planning, “and to be honest, I would not want to live there,” he said.

The commission approved the Brownsboro master plan 13-1, with Richard Morris dissenting.

“This is the precursor of regulation,” he said. “It will impact our freedom.”

The plan now goes to Oldham County Fiscal Court and the City of Crestwood.

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