

Buckley Annex plans anger Lowry residents

Contributed by Devon Barclay
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Spanning some 72 acres between Monaco and Quebec, First and Bayaud, plans to redevelop the area adjacent to Lowry known as the Buckley Annex have stalled under public pressure for more responsible development. The annex is currently a Department of Defense accounting facility.

Still owned by the Air Force, the Buckley Annex parcel will be sold to an unnamed developer late in 2008 or early in 2009, for an amount that has never been disclosed. In a bid to make the parcel more attractive for development, original plans for the site included twelve-story, 180-foot buildings. After round condemnation from neighbors of the site and demands that the site be developed within the widely-acclaimed Lowry redevelopment guidelines, new plans were presented with four 100-foot high seven-story buildings and two 90-foot high six story-buildings. Comprising some 800 residential units, this plan was unveiled at what was to be the final public comment meeting on November 14.

This reduction in size and scale did little to quiet neighborhood concerns - and Crestmoor neighbors overwhelmingly voted against the condo towers. At the public hearing, more than 300 neighbors filled the gymnasium at Montclair Academy, and around 35 of them spoke at the meeting's close - mostly against the proposal.

Lowry residents are already angry that development of the Buckley Annex will not be conducted under the same redevelopment process and design standards as the rest of Lowry, and are concerned that the proposed project will increase Lowry's congestion, noise, and pollution, block the area's mountain view, and detract from the award-winning standards of the rest of Lowry.

The Department of Defense is using the LRA to oversee the development the parcel, but has not formally conveyed title to the authority - nor is it expected to. That absence of transparency has fueled controversy. In December of 2005, the Lowry Community Master Association called the redevelopment of the DFAS property (Buckley Annex) "critically important" and stated that the LCMA "(would) be working closely with the LRA and others to ensure that those developments match the feel of Lowry and that our design guidelines are followed . To help maintain Lowry's place as a premiere community, we are looking to annex any such developments into the LCMA."

As part of the development process that ensued, the LRA created several task forces to evaluate plans and gather input from the surrounding community. However, because the LRA isn't formally in charge of the parcel's redevelopment - merely the planning - critics argue that the Department of Defense is using the LRA's credibility and veneer of task force oversight to help sell development at the site that is unpalatable otherwise. The LRA has stated that the Buckley Annex isn't subject to the design guidelines that govern development at Lowry, and that guidelines will be established for Buckley during the city's rezoning process.

That has neighbors concerned. And they're also concerned that the LCMA hasn't been able to take a position. On December 7, a group of these neighbors met to form a new registered neighborhood association, Lowry United Neighborhoods, in a bid to break through the multi-level, multi-tiered development and public input process that has had the effect of making it extremely difficult for people to become involved or heard. Says Dodie Hudson, one of the group's founding members, "it's been formed out of frustration, and to have a voice over growing issues that have presented themselves. Issues that the LCMA has not been able to take a position on."

After the November meeting, Councilwoman Johnson went back to developers and the design team and made clear that the seven-story maximum height would have to be lowered to four stories, in keeping with the surrounding development at Lowry. These building heights would range from 60 to 65 feet, and development would include underground parking.

In June, it was proposed that the development hold a much lower density - 500 units, or roughly seven units per acre. Alternative A, the proposal was accepted by the surrounding community and the Task Forces picked by the LRA, but then ignored.

Because of the infrastructure development costs— estimated to be \$24 million— recouping those costs will lead to higher density than many Lowry residents support. Councilwoman Johnson will be forming a Buckley Annex Community Advisory committee to provide further input as the city must legislate zoning for the annex in the form of a PUD, or planned unit development.

The LRA will present the Buckley Annex plan at a combined meeting of the Community Advisory Committee and Planning/Disposition Subcommittee at the Eisenhower Chapel on Dec. 18. at 6 p.m