

Sherman Planning and Zoning approves new overlay district

BY KATHY WILLIAMS

HERALD DEMOCRAT

The first major piece in implementing Sherman's Comprehensive Master Plan passed its first hurdle on Tuesday when the Planning and Zoning Commission approved a Blalock Commercial Overlay District.

The unanimous vote to send the draft ordinance to the Sherman City Council with the recommendation it pass came after nearly an hour and a half of public comments.

Sherman Mayor Bill Magers laid out the argument in favor of the new ordinance that would allow certain types of commercial development in a portion of the formerly industry-only district. In addition to allowing retail businesses, the ordinance would put much stricter building requirements on how the buildings would look and put wider setbacks among the buildings and from highways and residential areas.

Magers said that he and Sherman Economic Development Corp. President John Boswell had twice visited officials with all but two of the industries in Blalock Industrial Park. They had secured either the blessing or encouragement from each of those businesses except for the two that granted only one meeting: GlobiTech and ActiTech.

Because of information they gained during those meetings, Magers said, they had stricken some of the types of businesses that would be allowed in the commercial district. He said they listened to the industries' concerns. The result, he said, is an ordinance that balances the needs of industry with the best use of land resources in that area. It allows Sherman's budget potentially to gain more in sales tax receipts after the tax switch that gave all landholders, including the industries, a 20-percent property tax break beginning several years ago.

Magers said creation of the overlay district is supported by three points of the Comprehensive Master Plan: It will boost the prospects for economic development at the southern gateway to the city; it will enhance the appearance of the southern gateway; and it will improve safety in the area.

Representatives of two GlobiTech and ActiTech spoke against the idea of allowing retail business there, both cited concerns about gaining air quality permits in the future. They are two of the closest industries to the land in the district. However, there already is one retail business and several residential zones in the area.

Andy Olmstead, the owner of the only retail establishment currently in the district, questioned the need for the overlay. And the owner of a vacant lot, asked if they could

just leave things the way they are on the east side of the highway. GlobiTech and ActiTech also submitted letters stating their opposition to the overlay district. Tyson Foods' Manager Mike Gerleman and Carey Cox real estate wrote letters of support.

In the audience were the leaders of Texas Instruments, Fisher Control, Progress Rail, The Folger Coffee Co., Cox and Walt DeRonde, who is developing the golf course residential addition to the south of the area under consideration. They did not speak during the meeting.

Boswell delivered word of his Board of Directors' statement of unanimous support for the commercial district. SEDCO is largest landowner near the property in the overlay district and is responsible for bringing new industries to Sherman and in retaining the ones already located there. He said the information SEDCO had gathered led him and his board of directors to believe that the commercial district would not create a problem with either attracting new industries or keeping the old ones.

The Commercial Overlay District includes the area at the intersection of U.S. Highway 75 and Heritage Parkway (FM 1417) north from just south of FM 1417 bridge, east and west, north to include the frontage area in front of Sherman Hills Country Club on the west and to Post Oak Creek on the east. The eastern side also takes in the portion of property fronting North Travis Street and Sam Rayburn Freeway. It does not include the residential area behind the hotels, Constitution Village, nor the truck stop on the north side of Heritage Parkway. It does include the current fire station and the former Texas Department of Public Safety property.

The largest piece of open land is in front of the former Johnson & Johnson building, a portion of which contains ActiTech.

The matter now will go to the Sherman City Council for consideration.