

Homes slated for E. Austin

KB plans to put 117 units in burgeoning Riverside area

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A national home builder is planning a 117-unit, single-family housing development on East Riverside Drive — a corridor city leaders hope to one day populate with urban transit hubs linking downtown to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

The 22-acre neighborhood, proposed by KB Home (NYSE: KBH) and contingent on zoning changes, got a 7-2 nod from the Planning Commission this month before heading to the City Council for a final vote in coming weeks.

The land, at 6716 E. Riverside Drive, is owned by **Vince DiMare** of Equity Secured Capital LP, and is under contract to be sold to KB Home. The deal is expected close if the City Council approves the zoning changes, which require a downgrade in land-use intensity from commercial to residential.

The housing project, called Riverside Gardens, seeks to mirror Riverside Meadows, a nearby development built by Centex Homes. The KB Home project received the neighborhood organization's full support, but not a major nearby landholder's.

That's because the East Riverside Corridor Master Plan, adopted by the city last year, envisions four concentrated areas of development along the corridor, which city leaders want to be hubs around transit stops.

Staff recommended maximum heights up to 160 feet with a development bonus for properties in the hubs.

But the plan has yet to be codified into zoning and development regulations. Once that's done — estimated to be finished this fall — it will strengthen compatibility standards along the corridor.

Such standards prevent high-rise developments from going up near single-family development.

City planners said the KB Home development is not in one of the area's proposed hub zones, and that single-family use is in line with what the master plan would allow at the site.

Despite this, city lobbyist **Ron Thrower** of Thrower Design told planning commissioners the KB Home development would reduce the development potential of his client's adjacent 19-acre site.

Building single-family lots along a corridor the city wants to be dense doesn't make sense, Thrower said, adding that he plans to make his case to the City Council too.

While Thrower found two sympathetic planning commissioners, **Alfonso Hernandez** and **Jay Reddy**, the majority supported KB Home's plan.

"I just feel like development could be better, as opposed to what they are proposing to do on those lots," Hernandez said.

Commissioners in favor of the KB Home plan said they were pleased that the neighborhood organization supported the housing.

KB Home also appeased commissioners by agreeing to leave a tract 400 feet deep from the Riverside Drive frontage undeveloped and zoned for mixed use.

City staff said proposed compatibility standards would allow for a mixed-use development four or five stories high.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin