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Impact study stalls LaSalle

By JACKIE KLEIN

Developers of the controversial \$100 million Park LaSalle project will be required to submit a community impact statement before starting the first phase of construction on the 50-acre regional center.

Southfield City Council Monday, after a parade of residents from Southfield and six surrounding cities insisted on an environmental study, unanimously turned down the developers' request to waive the impact statement required by city ordinance.

A coalition of 15 civic, environmental and planning groups and the Concerned Citizens of Franklin have attempted to bar any construction on the massive project until an impact statement is prepared.

S.B. McLaughlin Associates Inc., the Toronto-based development firm, wanted the temporary waiver in order to begin construction of a nine-story office-retail building on a 6.5-acre parcel on the site. The property is located on Twelve Mile between Telegraph and Northwestern in Southfield's so-called "Silver Triangle."

DEVELOPERS AGREED to submit a community impact statement on all phases of construction, including the office structure, before permits are issued for additional apartment, hotel and retail buildings. Council members, however, maintained they were obliged to follow terms of the city ordinance.

Billy L. Turner, vice-president of McLaughlin's U.S. operations, said after the meeting the impact statement could be completed in two weeks since most of the studies have already been accomplished.

"There'll be another public hearing on the site plan and community impact statement, and opponents of the development will find something else to complain about," Turner said. "They don't want the project improved, they want it destroyed."

McLaughlin will also submit a revised site plan for the reduction of a proposed 25-story, 372-unit apartment building for the elderly to a 12-story, 200-unit conventional apartment tower in phase one. Also proposed for phase one construction is a 33-room pub-hotel, health club and restaurant.

Opponents of the project claim it will create serious and irrevocable damage to the environments of Southfield, Franklin Village, Farmington Hills, Bingham Farms, Bloomfield Township, West Bloomfield and all downstream communities in the Rouge River basin.

DURING MONDAY'S three-hour, standing-room-only council meeting, a record number of Southfield residents, as well as homeowners in neighboring communities, expressed concern about potential traffic, air, noise and water pollution the project could generate.

But some Southfield homeowners complained that vacant land in the "Silver Triangle" is an eyesore, populated by rats and littered with debris. These residents criticized those from Franklin for "interfering with the internal affairs of the city."

Southfield City Council last December enacted an ordinance requiring de-

Hills residents rap LaSalle high-rise

By JACKIE KLEIN

Southfield residents and others from neighboring communities had a lot to say about Park LaSalle at Monday's city council meeting, and most of the comments were negative.

Homeowners came in droves to urge council members to demand a community impact statement be prepared by S.B. McLaughlin Associates Inc., the Toronto-based development firm, before the company is given the green light to begin construction on the project.

Council members complied with the homeowners' wishes, voting unanimously to turn down McLaughlin's request to waive the impact statement, which is required by city ordinance.

Southfield developer Manny Dembs got the biggest laugh of the evening when he agreed with McLaughlin that a temporary waiver of the impact statement be granted so construction can begin.

"I know you don't go for pressure," Dembs told council members. "But you can only be recalled once."

The following are quotes from homeowners, environmentalists, attorneys and council members:

*Ida Snyder-Southfield: "Is it a precedent for neighboring communities to direct Southfield on how to run its affairs? Have we ever involved ourselves in the internal affairs of other communities?"

*Judith Owens-Southfield: "South-

field residents are concerned about this city. It's the better part of rationality to have an impact statement in hand before the project is started."

*J.W. Powell, Case Street, Southfield: "I've lived near the site of the proposed project for 28 years and I'm tired of watching rats run across the roads and dope addicts in abandoned houses. Let's clean it up and build the project."

*Ruth Gellman-Southfield: "I have petitions with 408 signatures of Southfield residents who don't want approval for a portion of Park LaSalle without an environmental impact statement. We hope council won't waive our rights for the future. If the project is unduly damaging, it should be modified or eliminated."

*May Sternick-Farmington Hills: "We fear increased traffic and inability of roads to handle it. We share a common border with Southfield, and we're afraid this project will stimulate similar requests in our community."

*Frances Gazda-Franklin Village: "Southfield has already damaged Franklin and me personally by stepping into the internal affairs of our city with its bulldozers. I use the word bulldozers literally and symbolically when home values are destroyed, neighborhoods change, crime spills over and problems are forced on our small community beyond its capacity to endure."

*Judith Wisner-Southfield: "We want to make the decision about Park LaSalle by ourselves, for ourselves and based on our needs and aspirations. Many showcase projects in Southfield ran into opposition from one interest group or another before they were approved and constructed. But we relied on our own wisdom to make proper decisions."

*Verona Morse-Rouge Basin Coalition: "We must preserve the flora and fauna of the Rouge. Park LaSalle is in the middle of the watershed and we urge a community impact statement."

*Detroit Audubon Society representative: "The first construction phase is part of a larger project and shouldn't be isolated. Can you replace unique old trees and wild life preserves on this 50 acres which is as far from us as the crows fly?"

*Bernard Isenberg-Franklin Village councilman: "We've been concerned

velopers of major projects to submit a community impact statement. The ordinance applies to site plans of 10 acres or more in size and developments of 150,000 square feet or 200 dwelling units or more.

The ordinance requires developers to submit information on relevant city services, traffic generation, environmental effects, employment, revenues and tax distribution. Information is reviewed and analyzed by the city planner, public services director, traffic engineer and parks and recreation head.

Larry K. Griffis, attorney for McLaughlin, asked his client be granted a limited waiver on the impact study because "the company can't afford the delay before starting construction on the office-retail building."

DEVELOPERS, Griffis said, have scaled down the height and density of the project to comply to the wishes of city council since Park LaSalle was first proposed more than three years ago. The nine-story office building, he maintained, would have no significant community impact.

Fred Donor, head of Concerned Citizens of Franklin and spokesman for the coalition of 15 area groups opposing the project, said the issue isn't a Southfield vs. Franklin battle but an attempt by all residents "to find the best solution to Park LaSalle."

"The impact of this development on the physical, social and economic environment is a matter of serious, regional concern," Donor said. "The burden of proof that this project won't cause irrevocable damage is on Southfield and the developers."

"Any community impact statement submitted after the project is started is lip service to environmental concerns."

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In order to allow our patients and staff an opportunity to participate in the Farmington Founder's Festival, our office will close at 6 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, July 21 and 22 and will be closed Saturday, July 23rd.

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