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Lab 2

Story 4-Meeting

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Stillwater City Council decided Monday to table a vote on permitting the building of apartments at 315 S. Hester St. to an undecided date after heavy back and forth debate.

The complex, which Keystone Engineering designed, plans to have 107 units containing a total of 164 beds in a five-story building. It is located two blocks away from campus, The Strip and Campus Corner.

The meeting, held at the Stillwater Municipal Building, had only three empty seats as an unofficial headcount of 66 people were in attendance to dispute whether the construction should be allowed.

Stillwater Mayor Nathan Bates said he likes the general idea of the plan, but he wasn’t ready to sign off on it yet.

“I think that this is the direction that development is moving in Stillwater,” Bates said. “I think that this would be good for the community. I think there are some items that need to be reworked to fit, but overall I like this plan.”

Steve Miller, a member of nearby St. Andrews Episcopal Church, was a part of the majority in the audience who spoke of the potential consequences of a 72-foot-tall building in the middle of Stillwater.

“The apartments will look just like The Flats, but in a completely different area,” Miller said. “If tenets can’t park at this new place, they will go park at the church, which can’t enforce parking on weekends. Where will the congregation then park on Sunday mornings if all the students park there Saturday night?”

To add to the parking issue, Miller said he believes Keystone is not accurately estimating how many people would be living in the building.

“A lot of the 60 one-bedroom apartments will have two people living in them,” he said. “You will have couples that stay together and each person has their own car. I would guess that you really need about 200 parking spaces for the complex.”

Ann Hadaway, who drove from Tulsa to attend the meeting, fears the large structure could also harm residents of the area while also hurting local businesses.

“I have family who live right across from the street from where the apartment would be,” she said. “I worry about the safety of the people in that area on weekend nights as they meander through the streets on their way home from the bars or wherever they have fun at.”

To counter this, Councilor John Bartley said both Hester and Fourth streets would have to be widened to hold the increase in traffic that comes with an apartment complex.

Kelly Harris, who is the owner, president and principal engineer at Keystone Engineering, expects the new apartments to bring in new customers to businesses around the area. She met with representatives of the local companies and said they all were excited about the idea of this project.

One of the dissenters’ other worries was that Harris was planning on making 20 parking spots available for bicycles, which is short of the 107 the city requires. Harris used the location of the complex as her defense to this concern.

“We only have 20 spots because we have noticed that when students live this close to campus, they just walk to all of their classes,” she said.

Councilman Joe Weaver said providing parking for a place as dense as this complex is planned to be will be a difficult task.

“The area around there is tough on parking as it is,” he said. “We just want to make sure we are able to accommodate all of the modes of transportation with the space we have.”

Vice Mayor Charles Hopkins echoed Bates’ sentiment that he likes the concept of building a new complex for students, but has not seen enough to persuade him to grant permission to build.

“I don’t want to kill this project right now,” Hopkins said. “I just need more information to show me that the area is not too small to accommodate the density of the complex.”

Another potential kink in the building process could come from an unseen enemy; underground water pipes.

Jim Berchy of the Washington Street Business Association warned the divided audience the pipes might not be able to survive if they are forced to provide for the complex.

“We knew 40 years ago that are lines were in trouble,” he said. “The Hester Street water lines break constantly. We saw that come up again this past winter. They won’t be able to handle over 100 bathrooms.”

Despite all of the current roadblocks, Councilor Cody Scott said he is excited about the prospect of the complex. Like the other councilors, he is also hesitant to make a commitment yet.

“I think that this is a step in the right direction,” Scott said. “But until we can nail down a solid plan, I’m not comfortable stepping forward with it.”

Source Sheet

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