

Proposed growth in Star raises questions about city services

City Council will consider 507-acre planned community on Oct. 17

Katy Moeller
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Up to 1,800 homes could be built in Star as part of a 507-acre master planned community. That's a lot of homes for a city of about 5,000 — particularly one headed into a recall election Nov. 7 because of growth-related issues.

"There's nothing else in Star that will be this big," said Dave Roylance, president of the Idaho Division of Sacramento-based Corinthian Homes and developer of the community.

The Star City Council approved annexation of the east Canyon County property earlier this year, contingent upon approval of the development agreement. While the Corinthian property is in Canyon County, the rest of Star sits in Ada County. A public hearing is set for the Star council's Tuesday, Oct. 17, meeting, a city official said Friday.

Corinthian's proposal to build a planned community is part of a trend in the Treasure Valley. Ada County alone is now processing applications for five planned communities. Advocates of planned communities tout their holistic approach to building — they don't create gigantic mazes of homes disconnected from the rest of the community. They aim to meet the broader needs of residents, creating nearby opportunities for shopping, school sites, library branches and other amenities.

One of the things that makes the Corinthian proposal unique in the Valley is that the little city of Star is experiencing big turmoil over how it should grow. Mayor Nate Mitchell and three members of the City Council face a recall election prompted by a group who says the council is pro-growth and isn't adequately planning for its impacts.

The proposed East Canyon planned community also requires Star to grow across a county line — so the city would straddle Ada and Canyon counties.

That raises all sorts of jurisdictional questions:

- Which agency will provide police protection in the Canyon County section of the city?
- Who will maintain the roads and highways?
- Which schools will the students attend — and will there be room?
- Does the Star Sewer and Water District have the capacity to serve all those homes, along with growth in the rest of the city?

Roylance touts the East Canyon development — which will include commercial space on both the north and south sides of Idaho 44 and at least one school site — as a place where people can live, work, shop and play.

That could be comforting to anyone reading the traffic study done for the development.

The traffic study by Stanley Consultants projects an additional 28,436 vehicle trips per day to the area. It lists impacts on specific roads as well: 12,670 vehicles per day on Idaho 44 east of the site; 3,170 vehicles per day west of the site; 6,420 vehicles per day on Can-Ada Road.

The traffic study had considered the East Canyon development when 1,166 homes were proposed — hundreds of homes fewer than what's now on the table.

Roylance points out that Corinthian's proposed 1,800 homes won't appear all at once. He said development of the community is market-driven and could take as long as 15 years to complete.

So if road-widening is needed to accommodate the added traffic, who will pay for it?

"There is no funding for widening the highway (Idaho 44) at this time," said Molly McCarty, a spokeswoman for Idaho Transportation Department.

McCarty said the department receives \$200 million more in road improvement requests than what it can fund.

Roylance said Corinthian Homes understands that and is prepared to pay for some or all of the road-widening costs for Idaho 44 and Can-Ada Road.

"We have a responsibility to deal with traffic impacts attributable to our project," he said.

Roylance, an engineer and longtime Treasure Valley resident, had his own development company before joining Corinthian Homes this year. His company developed Eagle's Lexington Hills, a 600-home subdivision that some say sets the tone for larger high-end projects in the city.

Corinthian Homes will work with the Middleton School District to help accommodate the district's needs for a future school site, Roylance said. He said that wouldn't necessarily mean the donation of a site; it might mean that the land could be sold to the school district at a discounted price.

Middleton School District Superintendent Richard Bauscher sent a letter in May to Corinthian Homes and the city of Star requesting donation of a minimum of two sites, totaling 80 acres, for an elementary and high school.

Bauscher said his district already has three other donated elementary sites. The district has a greater need for another high school site.

Who will provide police protection in the Canyon County section of Star is unclear.

"My understanding is that we will patrol it," said Ada County Deputy Ken Ramage, who runs the Star unit.

But Canyon County Sheriff Chris Smith had a different impression Friday.

"If it's in Canyon County, it's our responsibility, even if it's not our contract," Smith said.

What about roads?

Timothy Richard, district engineer for Canyon Highway District No. 4, said the district would maintain the roads in the Canyon section of Star.

"We are obligated (by law) to maintain roads within any city that does not have a functioning street department," Richard said.

The highway district is asking the city to send property taxes collected for road maintenance to the district. Star may be entitled to a portion of the tax collected for roads, but the highway district hopes to see all of it be sent to them.

The issue of sewer and water capacity is clearer.

Hank Day, maintenance and operations foreman for the Star Sewer and Water District, says the sewer plant currently has an excess capacity of 2,000 equivalent dwelling units and can easily expand capacity.

As for water, the district has two wells and another one was recently drilled, though it's not on line yet. He said they have plans for several more wells.