



Commissioners extend Millersburg land use comment period

ALBANY — After a brief Public Hearing Tuesday morning, Linn County Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker agreed to accept written comments concerning a proposed land swap in Millersburg open for 72 hours, give Millersburg officials time to respond and hold another public hearing at 10 a.m. on March 14 at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center.

The City of Millersburg wants to move 167-plus acres near the southwest corner of the city out of its Urban Growth Boundary and trade that for an adjacent 163 acres. Both properties are zoned for farming, although the 163 acres is considered better farm ground than what it would replace, which is allowed by land use planning rules. The 167 acres is a young hazel nut orchard.

The county held a Public Hearing on the issue on January 24, but at that time, the city's representatives did not offer many details about why they have made this proposal, nor what type of industry might buy the property in question.

After that meeting, the city held a public meeting at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center and provided information that a company called Sofidel, which is based in Tuscany, Italy, is interested in developing a paper mill at the site. Sofidel is a global company that makes everything from paper towels to toilet paper.

To the county's knowledge, no purchase contracts have been signed.

At the January 24 hearing, area farmers opposed the "swap" saying the prime farmland should not be taken out of production and that the City of Millersburg should not creep farther westward and onto adjoining farmlands.

After the January 24 hearing, the Board of Commissioners provided time for written comments for or against the proposal,



Linn County Commissioners, left to right, Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker.

plus time for rebuttal by the city. It was during this time period that one person among many who commented, noted that the City of Millersburg had held the public meeting and that it was reported on in a local social media blog. Tuesday, Board Chairman Nyquist said he believed the public should have a right to comment since so much new information was made available at the Millersburg meeting. He said the commissioners can take "compatibility" into considering when looking at land use requests. He added that the term "compatibility means different things to different people." Commissioner Tucker reminded his fellow commissioners that the decision criteria do not include the type of business that might go on the property. "Our decision has nothing to do with what's coming there," Tucker said.

But Chairman Nyquist there is an issue of "optics and a sense of fairness." "At the January 24 Public Hearing, the client didn't seem to know much about what type of industry was interested," Nyquist said. "It just wasn't done in a way that gave members of the public an opportunity to speak. The record seems to be incomplete, or just not correct." Commissioner Sprenger said that while she is always anxious to get land use issues settled as quickly as possible, she was "hesitant to close the door" on comments just yet.

Written comments will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Friday, March 10 at Board of Commissioners, 300 4th Ave. SW, Albany, OR 97321 or mmeyer@co.linn.or.us.

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