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Dayton growth challenged

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Growth in Lyon County has come under fire in the last few weeks ever since a developer started floating plans to expand and change a large planned unit development being built in Dayton.

The criticism has come from area residents as well as the Dayton Regional Advisory Council, who are asking a fundamental question: If development can't be stopped, can it at least be slowed down? "It is here again that the council finds that growth in Dayton is being developerdriven at an insane pace and the health and safety of the present residents is not being given its due consideration," the council said after a May 5 meeting to discuss the planned unit development, or PUD.

The PUD is the Lakemont Homes project, a more than 1,200-acre development off Dayton Valley Road.

Lakemont Companies, headed by Edward Johanson, who has spent the last several weeks talking to the community and the county planning commission about plans for the PUD, acquired the property with partner Wade Development Co. Inc. in 1999 after the original developer, John Lawrence, ran into financial trouble.

The PUD includes several residential subdivisions, and an 18-hole golf course, and in the last year Lakemont/Wade have added hundreds of new homes surrounding the course.

Now they want to rezone 34 acres for commercial purposes, change zoning on a total of about 200 acres primarily to reduce lot sizes, and get a use permit on about 700 acres to add 2,400 homes, build a casino, hotel, a nine-hole golf course and a motor coach park.

The PUD and other developments in the area raise concerns for at least some residents about the fast pace of growth in Dayton Valley.

"I don't think Dayton will bear the development being proposed," said Ingrid White, a Dayton resident, at the Lyon County planning commission meeting last week.

"The infrastructure isn't there."

Lyon County is now studying broader issues raised by the overnight development in Dayton.

The county has contracted with the Western Nevada Development District to study alternative routes to Highway 50.

WNDD has identified 12 routes to be discussed at a June public workshop, according to Bill Cadwallader, planning director at WNDD.

After that, it will be presented to the county commission for action.

The goal, said Cadwallader, is to create two, interconnected roads north and south of 50 that will handle local traffic so 50 can be used as a thoroughfare between Silver Springs, Stagecoach, Dayton and Carson City.

And then there's water.

Lyon County is now studying the issue to determine how much water is available to serve Dayton and what size population that would support.

So far, the county has identified enough water rights to support 40,000 people, according to Chuck Swanson, director of public works.

The county commission's office estimates there are 5,000 residents in Dayton now, although that number is quickly growing.

Those water rights are owned by developers and ranchers, who have not committed to sell them.

And Swanson said it's unlikely there will be an opportunity to import water into the area since all the surrounding areas are equally strapped for water.

"Water is a big issue," said Swanson.

"I can build sewer treatment plants, but I can't build water."

Some residents say the existing Dayton school system can't handle an influx of children, and that the town's tiny fire department won't be able to protect the growing density of homes.

In response, Lakemont's Johanson has said the developers will donate 10.5 acres for the county to build a new elementary school, and is donating at the request of the fire department what he calls a golf cart/ambulance to help the firefighters respond to emergencies.

Lakemont/Wade also promised to fix Dayton Valley Road, which has been in disrepair for the last several years.

Johanson said the road would be repaved and expanded in three phases, with final completion in 2006 or 2007.

Last week Johanson made his presentation to the Lyon County Planning Commission, which hears rezoning requests before the county commission and makes recommendations to the commissioners.

The planning commission approved the developers' application for a master plan amendment, change of zoning on 96 acres from two and five acre lots to 6,000 square feet lots, and 34 acres to commercial tourist use.

But the planning commission stalled on the special use permit, which would allow the developers to build the casino resort and motor coach park, and to include the golf course as part of the PUD requirement for 20 percent of open space.

In the end, at 7 p.m., the commissioners agreed they couldn't reach a vote without a lot more information so Johanson asked for a 30-day continuance.

That means Lakemont/Wade won’t be heard until late June or July by the county commission, which makes the ultimate decision whether the developers can make the requested changes to the PUD.

Those conditions may mitigate some of the complaints from residents and others.

For one, the developers may not be allowed to include the golf course as part of the open space.

They may also have to limit home building near the airplane runaway there to avoid safety hazards, as well as require homebuyers, as part of deed restrictions, to recognize the airport.

That’s in response to concerns from the homeowners who use the airstrip that new residents might try to close the airport.

Conditions would likely be attached to any motor coach park, if it were allowed.

As planned now, the 133-unit park for Class A motor coaches would surround an existing neighborhood, whose residents voiced much of the criticism of the developers’ plans for the PUD.

One commissioner present at the meeting said he thought the developers would get most of what they wanted.

“It will probably pass with lots of conditions,” said Bob Milz, Lyon County commissioner.

“It’s probably a good project and better than a lot that come before us.”