

Ruston Daily Leader

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Good Afternoon

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Council to vote on moratorium for some construction

By Laura Bond
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Ruston's aldermen are slated to consider an 18-month moratorium on the construction of new apartments, duplexes and high-density subdivisions in certain sections of the city during their April meeting.

The proposed ordinance, which was given the green light this week by the city's Planning and Zoning Commission, prohibits the building of such structures in high-density residential areas.

The ordinance would not apply to construction that has started nor any projects that already have obtained Planning and Zoning Commission approval.

"This is essentially a moratorium on the construction of three or more units in any high-density residential area," said Pat Doane, city planner. "But apartments, duplexes and high-density subdivisions could still be built in commercial areas during this time, excluding the area around Interstate 20."

Doane said high-density subdivision developments include those with under 10,000 square foot lots, such as Creekwood Subdivision on Kentucky Avenue, but lower density subdivisions would still be allowed.

City officials say the proposed ordinance has stemmed from residents' concerns about future land use that were brought up at Community Visioning Day as a part of Ruston 21, which is the city's master plan for the future.

"Our citizens were concerned about a number of issues, and preserving our existing neighborhoods was one of the widely expressed concerns voiced by Ruston citizens during the visioning day process," Ruston Mayor Dan Hollingsworth said.

The anticipated ending moratorium date — September 30, 2010 — is expected to follow the completion of the Ruston 21 land use plan, which city officials hope will

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A public hearing for the proposed moratorium will be held at the Ruston City Council's next meeting, which is planned for 5:30 p.m. April 6 at City Hall.

incorporate smart growth style to include more open spaces, as well as help developers reduce their infrastructure costs.

Some real estate agents, however, have concerns about the moratorium and seek more information on how it might impact the local economy in the meantime.

"This kind of took us all by surprise," Today's Realty owner/broker Frank Cordaro said. "We don't really know why it's needed, and we want more information on it. I think any moratorium or anti-stimulus is not what builders, plumbers and electricians need right now. I'm afraid this will hurt the Ruston economy."

Doane said areas affected by the moratorium only make up about 13 percent of the city, and the majority of those areas are already developed. So ultimately, she said only around 4 percent of all land in Ruston will be affected.

University Hills Neighborhood Association President Peter Gallagher is in favor of the moratorium and efforts to develop a land use plan known as smart style.

"I'm familiar with cities that have implemented smart growth that have vibrant and identifiable neighborhoods," Gallagher said. "When somebody buys up several properties, bulldozes them and puts up apartments where there was originally wooded area or several houses, it destroys the character and spaciousness and lowers property values. Smart growth doesn't mean you necessarily have small and large properties grouped together, but there will be some green space intermixed with that which could include parks or trails."