

City, county: Toll road OK

Boulder officials drop their opposition to Jefferson Parkway

By Heath Urie 12/22/10
Camera Staff Writer

A \$5 million land deal dangled by Jefferson County officials has convinced the Boulder City Council and Boulder County commissioners to drop their longtime opposition to the proposed Jefferson Parkway toll road.

The deal, which still needs to be ratified through formal intergovernmental agreements, means Jeffco's money would be combined with an additional \$5 million that would need to come from the city of Boulder, Boulder County and potentially other sources to purchase and protect a 640-acre piece of land near Colo. 93 that's now owned by the Colorado Land Board.

In separate resolutions approved

Tuesday, the Boulder City Council and Boulder County Board of Commissioners agreed to give financial and political support toward purchasing the square-mile of land, known as Section 16, and eventually turn over control of the property to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be included in the nearby Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge.

Section 16 is east of Colo. 93 and just north of Coal Creek Canyon Drive. Boulder officials believe the purchase will help prevent commercial and residential development from sprawling north along the highway.

The resolutions also call for both Boulder and Boulder County to withdraw their opposition to the acquisition of right-of-way for the toll road along the eastern edge of the wildlife refuge. Instead, each group of officials will adopt a "neutral position" on the construction of the highway.

The Boulder council approved its resolution unanimously. The Boulder County commissioners approved their similar

version in a 2-0 vote, with Commissioner Cindy Domenico absent.

The deal puts to rest the city and county's long battle with proponents of the Jefferson Parkway, which is envisioned as a toll road that would com-

plete the beltway around the metro area. The highway would connect to the Northwest Parkway toll road on the north, travel south along the east boundary of the Rocky Flats refuge and connect with Colo. 93 just north of Golden.

Boulder Councilwoman Lisa Morzel, who has been the city's point person on the toll road negotiations, said that "in no way have I ever liked the Jefferson Parkway or ever supported it."

But she said that after going through 14 years of negotiations with multiple officials from multiple cities and counties, the Section 16 deal represents the "best that we can do for the city of Boulder and for the region."

Boulder Mayor Susan Osborne said the city's only alternative would be to mount a legal campaign against the toll road. That, she said, would be expensive, time-consuming and uncertain.

The pivotal decision drew input from officials across the region.

John Putnam, an attorney who represents Golden on transportation issues, called the parkway a "dreadful project," but said the purchase of Section 16 is important.

"I think this is a critical part in preserving as much of the mountain backdrop as possible," he said.

Debra Williams, a Superior town trustee, told the Boulder council that the proposed toll

road is "literally a road to nowhere."

"It will not complete the beltway," she said. "It dumps traffic on both ends on arterial roads that can't support a higher volume" of traffic.

Williams urged the council not to approve the resolution because there is not yet a formal study about the potential environmental impacts of the parkway, and because the highway likely wouldn't include alternative transportation in its design.

Superior Mayor Andrew Mucke, however, said earlier Tuesday afternoon that he thinks the agreement is "reasonable" given the importance of blocking development along Colo. 93. But he did say he remains concerned about the future toll road increasing traffic along McCaslin Boulevard.

Mucke said he hopes Boulder County will look out for Superior when it comes time to negotiate details of the parkway that could impact the town.

Will Toor, a Boulder County commissioner, said Tuesday that the board "certainly will be encouraging Jefferson County ... to work with Superior and address the issues that Superior is

raising."

Toor said the land deal for Section 16 is a good outcome after years of virtually deadlocked negotiations. He said the open space purchase would put a needed buffer between south Boulder County and Arvada's planned Candelas development — which is expected to include thousands of residential units, millions of square feet of office space and buildings up to 180-foot tall.

If Section 16 were open to development, he said, there is a real risk that the development could sprawl north along the highway. Without the land, developers would have a hard time annexing land beyond Candelas, he added.

"The proposal that is before us does, I think, address those development issues in a significant way," Toor said.

While Boulder and Boulder County both opposed the parkway's inclusion in the Denver Regional Council of Governments' Regional Transportation Plan, the highway was recently accepted into the long-range vision for the region, making it easier for the project to find financial backers.

Rocky Flats' "Section 16" property

