

# News

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**4/1/2010**

### **City of Jersey Village Mayor says Planned Development Opportunities South of U.S. 290 hold Great Potential**

The City of Jersey Village has a unique opportunity in its future that could add an interesting dimension to the city, and could add a broader mix of residential, office and commercial properties into the small city's tax base, said Mayor Russell Hamley.

Hamley told Cy-Fair Houston Chamber of Commerce members that the city is in the midst of a multi-phase "Transit-Oriented Development" study effort that is focused on a proposed combined suburban commuter rail/long-distance rail station at Jones Road and Highway 290, and acreage south of that station in an area where Jones Road will be extended to FM 529.

"This is the most exciting thing we have on our agenda and for our entire economic area," Hamley said at the committee's April 1 meeting.

Hamley said the majority of the city is residential single-family, and lies in an area north of Highway 290. The city has annexed 50 acres south of Highway 290 – near the pending Jones Road extension – but another 700 acres in that area is in the city's extraterritorial jurisdiction, which means it can be annexed by the city.

"That area is primarily undeveloped, but has some trailer parks, single-family homes, industrial businesses and farmland," Hamley said. "Several years ago the city looked at annexing the area and did not make any sense because it was a mishmash of different uses and different-sized properties. It would be hard to piece that together."

Hamley said the scenario changed about two years ago when he had a discussion with Harris County Judge Ed Emmett about a proposed commuter rail system on the Highway 290/Hempstead Highway corridor.

"The more we talked the more excited I became about the idea," Hamley said. "Commuter rail does not stop frequently, and it makes a lot of sense to put the first stop out of downtown in Jersey Village. We are the only city that can control and zone development."

Last year the city hired Kimley-Horn and Associates to map out and analyze the feasibility of a Transit-Oriented Development project.

"So far, there are no indications that it would be a detriment to the city," he said.

A preliminary plan and drawings presented to Jersey Village City Council recently show a proposed commuter rail station at Jones Road/Highway 290; about 1 million square feet of commercial and office space; a proposed 18-acre area for higher-density office space along the U.S. 290 border; mixed-use three-to-five-story buildings (commercial on lower floors and office/residential on upper floors) in the area's "core," which is a 23-acre area between the future Jones Road extension and Wright Road; a gradual decrease in building height in the 57-acre area outside of the core; primarily residential development – brownstones, condominiums, and townhomes – in the combined 81-acre "neighborhood transition" and "neighborhood" sections; about 38 acres devoted to parks and open space; and a 4.35-acre public area that could one day house a Jersey Village City Hall. Monday the council voted to adopt the city's conceptual transit-oriented development master plan – the plan incorporated input from city staff, elected officials and residents – and to move forward with a fiscal impact analysis that would detail what it would cost for the city to move forward with the plan.

The plan also maps out a 75-acre roadway grid that could be constructed in partnership with developers. The primary existing roads in the area are Wright, Charles and Fairview, which would be incorporated into the plan.

The Jersey Village City Council voted to move to the next phase of the study, which is the financial impact analysis.

The city's April 19 city council meeting will be a half-day workshop devoted to discussing next steps and ideas for the transit-oriented development plan. No city funds have been dedicated to the execution of the plan yet.

Governmental Affairs Committee Co-Chairman Reginald Lillie said the development could be substantial in terms of expanding the city's boundaries and bringing in new businesses.

"We don't have multi-millions to go out and develop a large area with infrastructure, but we may be able to justify selling some bonds to get started," Hamley said. "We need to zone the property before we get going. Developers who are building in a high-end commercial environment want to know what is being built next to them."

Hamley said it would be vital to get the approval of Jersey Village residents before moving forward with annexation plans or selling bonds for infrastructure development.

#### 4/1/2010

#### **Ripples from Panama Canal Expansion will extend to Houston Port and Surrounding Region**

The impacts of the Panama Canal widening will filter to the Houston region, said Doug Sethness, vice president of the Houston firm CH2M Hill and a principal project manager/program manager for the Panama Canal expansion project.

"We think the Panama Canal expansion is a game changer, but we are not sure yet how it is going to change," Sethness told Cy-Fair Houston Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee members at an April 1 meeting.

The expansion project, which will be completed in 2014, will allow larger ships to travel through the canal. Larger ships can carry more containers, which could equate to greater loads coming into the Gulf Coast area and more truck and rail traffic handling those containers.

However, Sethness said, the Port of Houston is not a deepwater port – that requires a 53-foot depth – but Brazosport is getting there. Gulf Coast ports are making changes to accommodate the larger ships that would be able to travel through the Panama Canal after 2014.

But there is more to be done, he said.

"We need intermodal improvements in Texas," he said. "We need to improve our infrastructure to the heartland and other Gulf Coast states. We need focused logistics education programs in schools." The Panama Canal expansion project is creating a set of three new "locks," which lift ships up to the main elevation of the [Panama Canal](#), and widening different portions of the canal to allow for two-way traffic in some areas.

The current two-lock system opened in 1914 is about 900 feet wide and accommodates ships with a 40-foot draft. The new three-lock system will be about 1,200 wide and will allow ships with a 50-foot draft.

"The ships going through it today take up every inch of space," Sethness said. "Often they scrape their way through."

There are three primary load center ports in the U.S. – Seattle/Tacoma, Los Angeles/Long Beach and New York/New Jersey. He said the U.S. is importing less and exporting more.

The Gulf ports, which include all ports along the Texas and Louisiana coast, are further down on the list. The trade there is primarily for the petrochemical industry.

After World War II, many consumer products were made in Japan and ships carrying those items could travel to Los Angeles/Long Beach or through the Panama Canal to New York/New Jersey.

"As costs got higher we started buying things out of Korea, and they travelled the same way," Sethness said. "In the China decade we followed the same route."

"Now we are looking for a cheaper place to buy goods, and manufacturing plants are opening in Singapore and Malaysia," he said. "They can travel through the Suez or Panama canals."

As the manufacturing hubs move west to India, and eventually Africa, the Suez Canal could become the dominant route, Sethness said.

"For first time we are seeing price wars between the Suez and Panama," he said. Currently it costs about \$150,000 – 200,000 for ships to travel through the Panama Canal, and they are lined up waiting.

"All major (U.S.) ports are putting money into increasing the size of the ports," Sethness said. "We could possibly go into an overcapacity situation."

"The biggest potential risk is we face is over-building in our current economy," he said.

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