

Thank you, Councilwoman McKenzie.

I'm Becky Wade, director of the City Community Development Department. Development of affordable housing and coordination of homelessness services come through my department.

We are requesting that Council postpone a vote on Ordinance 12-F, the closure of a section of Myrtle Street at East Fifth Avenue, for 12 weeks.

I want to provide a little background and context of what's being proposed at this site, which is comprised of three City-owned vacant lots next door to Positively Living.

The City acquired this tract years ago, after the Smokies Southern League baseball team left Knoxville and Caswell Park was being developed as a recreation space and public park. Houses located on this property on East Fifth Avenue were demolished to make room for the park, and ultimately, this specific tract became cut off from the park by the outfield fences of the softball fields. It is idle and not used by Parks and Recreation, but it is zoned as open space.

Recently, Volunteer Ministry Center approached the City with an idea to acquire the property and develop 48 permanent supportive housing units there. There is a great need in Knoxville for these units, which serve extremely low-income residents – the poorest of our poor.

It's very early in the planning process, and these units are extremely expensive to build and manage, but VMC is working on its plans and exploring the availability of grant funding.

Because of the proximity to transit and support services, we believe this is a good location for permanent supportive housing.

At the City's request, once VMC had some conceptual plans for the project, they reached out to the Parkridge Neighborhood Association to provide information and seek input. We asked that this be done to ensure that the neighborhood would be informed and included in the process at its early stages. The City will continue to work with VMC and Parkridge and other nearby neighborhoods on both the zoning and the proposed use.

We believe a postponement of the street closure will give the City, VMC and the neighborhood more time to look at options and come back with more details.

There will be more opportunities for public input, if this project becomes viable. In addition to the proposed street closure, City Council at a future meeting would vote on the land conveyance and a rezoning of the property.

With the City as the property owner, Community Development had asked that this property be returned to residential use during Recode and the draft Recode map propose a RN-3 zone. It is important to note that the proposal by VMC will require a RN-6 or planned development zoning before it could move forward. So this proposed rezoning would have proceeded through Knoxville-Knox County Planning and then City Council before the project could move forward.

Nevertheless, due to misunderstandings we inadvertently caused, this morning we asked Knoxville-Knox County Planning to keep the "open space" zone on the property. The

Recode website zoning map will be updated by tomorrow morning to reflect this.

So when Council votes on the Recode ordinance, there will be no change in land use for this property – it will remain designated as open space.

We believe that leaving the existing open space use in place for now and starting from scratch on a rezoning at Myrtle and East Fifth is clearly a better, more transparent approach.

Bottom line: We request a postponement on the vote to close a section of Myrtle Street. Volunteer Ministry Center and the City will continue developing plans for permanent supportive housing at this site. And if the project is deemed to be feasible, the rezoning process would start with Knoxville-Knox County Planning, and then City Council would vote on the rezoning and conveyance of the property. But I emphasize that it's early in the development process, with many steps ahead and many opportunities for public input.