

# Village NEWS



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It was standing-room-only Wednesday at Poe Elementary School as neighbors turned out to hear an update about a high-rise project at Ashby and Bissonnet.

## Vote Delayed on Traffic Ordinance

The high-density traffic ordinance targeting the Ashby high-rise project at 1717 Bissonnet will be delayed by at least two weeks. A group of stakeholders, including representatives from the community and from Buckhead Investment Partners, Inc. (the developers behind the Ashby project), agreed to the delay on Jan. 31.

The ordinance was scheduled to go before Houston City Council on Feb. 6. The stakeholders' group agreed in November to delay the ordinance by 90 days; since that period has now expired, the item will appear on the Council agenda and must be extended by Council action.

By **Kate Bolen**

The Stop Ashby High Rise Task Force met at Poe Elementary on Wednesday, Jan. 30 to update the public on the status of the ordinance.

Stop Ashby High Rise Task Force Cochair Chris Amandes said the City of Houston cannot change any ordinances, laws or restrictions after a developer has filed a project with the City. However, the city can regulate a development's impact

on traffic.

Houston City Councilmember Anne Clutterbuck said the city has the legislative authority to regulate traffic, which is why a new traffic ordinance is being proposed.

Amandes said this approach came about once Mayor Bill White actually visited the proposed site of the Ashby high rise back in September.

"The mayor was flabber-

gasted," he said.

Amandes said the ordinance was tabled for 90 days because several developers expressed concerns that the ordinance would have an impact on "appropriate" projects, such as those on major thoroughfares.

He said a stakeholder group was formed with Southamton resident Bob Randolph appointed by Clutterbuck as one of the

**See Meeting page 10**

1 of 2

**Meeting from page 1**

group's 10 community members.

Amandes said the proposed ordinance will be "narrow," which means if developers are reasonable about their projects and build what is appropriate for an area, they will have no problems.

He said the ordinance will affect projects that will have an obvious significant impact on traffic and which meet the following criteria:

- high density;
- abuts a local and/or collector streets;
- the site is in a single family residential area;
- is more than 1,400 feet from a transit station; and
- will produce 100+ additional uncongested traffic trips.

Amandes said the proposed Ashby high rise easily meets all of the criteria listed in the ordinance. If it is passed, Buckhead developers Matthew Morgan and Kevin Kirton will have to redraw their plans.

He said Kirton and Morgan could find ways to alleviate traffic

congestion in the area. One possibility includes dedicating a right turn lane on Dunlavy (there is not room for one on Ashby). Intersection improvements cannot be made on Bissonnet due to limited rights-of-way.

Amandes said the ordinance will not prevent Morgan and Kirton from building a high rise nor will it allow the neighborhood any formal input on the project.

"We might have wanted more, but this is all we can get from the City of Houston. However, this is more than we thought we would get back in September and this is just one of the ways this project can be influenced," he said.

Clutterbuck said she has met with Kirton and Morgan numerous times, trying to persuade them to build something smaller or sell the property to a developer who will.

Clutterbuck said the developers have finally put a price tag on the property - \$2.6 million, which does not include the price of the land.

She has also spoken with several local developers who find the project to be "offensive."

Clutterbuck urged citizens to contact councilmembers, especially those at large, and persuade them to vote for the ordinance.

Resident Erica Roberts said one of the best ways to persuade councilmembers is to push the idea that if it can happen in Southampton and Boulevard Oaks, it could easily happen in their neighborhoods too.

"This is not just about us," Roberts said.

Houston City Councilmember Peter Brown said he has been working for the past two years to get regulations placed on development within the city.

"Thanks to y'all, people are starting to listen," Brown said.

He said Houston is losing quality growth to other surrounding cities such as the Woodlands and Sugarland because they have regulations.

Residents of Braeswood Place are currently dealing with a similar situation, where developers have proposed high density develop-

ments in a single-family residential neighborhood. The traffic ordinance, if passed, would impact these developments as well.