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Brick City calls for 100 downtown lofts

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Developer Matt Miller has big plans for a city block in downtown Springfield – and he needs the city's help to pull them off.

At the Sept. 5 meeting of Springfield City Council, Miller presented the redevelopment plan for his company's most ambitious project to date: Brick City, a mixed-use development covering a full city block comprising seven buildings in downtown Springfield. The \$12 million development, bounded by Campbell and Boonville avenues and Phelps and Water streets, would create 100 new lofts in addition to 25,000 square feet of office and retail space.

Brick City Redevelopment Corp., a partnership of Miller, Matthew Miller and Jeff Schrag, purchased the properties in August.

Miller, however, said the project cannot be completed without the assistance of tax abatement due to environmental concerns and the condition of the buildings. For that abatement to be available, the area would have to be blighted.

"There was just some bad math – we just couldn't make (the project) work after all the incentives," Miller told council, adding that none of his other redevelopment projects have required a declaration of blight. "It's not something we take lightly."

Miller is asking the city to freeze taxes at their current level for 10 years. After that time, taxes would be based on the current assessed value but would be abated by 50

percent. City Contract Development Specialist Mike MacPherson said all the affected entities have been contacted about the development; only Springfield R-XII schools responded, and their response was positive.

Councilman Denny Whayne was ready to vouch for Miller's prowess in redeveloping old buildings.

"He took on a project up north in the Cottage Heights that was a pretty dilapidated neighborhood, and he made a brand new city over there," Whayne said. "So I know Mr. Miller is capable of doing the same thing downtown."

Miller and company's other redevelopment projects include Wilhoit Plaza, formerly the Bay-Wilhoit building, and Founders Park Lofts, formerly Mulhollan Furniture.

Plans call for construction to begin on the Brick City development before the end of the year. Council is expected to vote on the plan at its Sept. 18 meeting.

A reprieve

Other developments might be stalled by a resolution passed at the meeting.

The resolution forces new multifamily housing developments to be submitted as planned developments, which gives city staff more control over development density.

The move comes as a result of concern over the impact of high-density developments on city infrastructure. Council and city staff will be looking to adjust the city's zoning ordinance, specifically the allow-

State audit of Springfield begins

Springfield is now under the state auditor's microscope.

Springfield City Council heard a presentation before its Sept. 5 meeting spelling out the audit process. The state will examine several departments in the coming months, including city finances, City Utilities and the Springfield Municipal Court.

The audit was initiated by a petition with 5,874 validated signatures, submitted to the auditor's office in June. By state law, 5,000 signatures were required, and the city covers the cost of the audit, estimated to be between \$60,000 and \$80,000.

Former Greene County Libertarian Party chairman Doug Burlison spearheaded the petition drive, citing questions about management of both CU and the

city's Police Officers' and Firefighters' Pension Fund. The questions increased when it was announced in July that more than \$1 million was missing from the city's municipal court.

Local Government Audit Director Thomas Kremer explained the process to council. Kremer said that after the information collection is complete, the auditor's office will put together a report and present it, along with any recommendations for changes, to the mayor, council and other city department leaders in a closed session. The city's responses will then be included in the final public report.

The entire audit process is confidential except for the final report, which Kremer said would come after the first of the year.

able density in low-, medium- and high-density multifamily residential zones.

Mayor Tom Carlson pointed to high apartment numbers: 735 apartment units were built in 2005, more than double 2004. Developers have added 626 apartments through August 2006.

Originally, council had planned to put a 120-day administrative delay on all multifamily developments, a move that met some objection.

"I don't necessarily think that a lot of construction is a bad thing. Our economy endured a lot of hard times because of the

strength of the construction industry," Matt Morrow, executive officer of the Home Builders Association of Greater Springfield, told council. "It's really hard to restart an economic engine once it's turned off."

Carlson proposed the planned development compromise after several council members expressed concern.

The move to planned developments will last 120 days; in the meantime, a task force of citizens and city staff will be formed to examine how to best amend city zoning requirements.