

Realtors oppose Spring Hill halt

▶ Board of directors is against moratorium, but dissenting agents expected at Mobile City Council meeting today

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Real Estate Editor

The board of directors for the Mobile Area Association of Realtors has sent a letter to the Mobile City Council opposing a moratorium on new construction in three areas of Spring Hill — a move expected to draw a crowd of dissenting agents to today's council meeting.

Agents from several real estate companies, including LL&B Real Estate and Roberts Brothers, plan to present the council with petitions favoring the moratorium.

The Village of Spring Hill seeks the six-month halt on projects to

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Realtors' board takes a stance

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allow time for city agencies to consider its revitalization plan. The nonprofit group hopes to turn the Spring Hill business district into a walkable area with shops close to the sidewalk and with parking on the street or at the rear.

The areas in question are: Old Shell Road at McGregor Avenue; Old Shell at Bit 'n Spur Road; and McGregor between Museum Drive and Spring Hill Avenue.

The council two weeks ago postponed consideration of a moratorium, and Councilwoman Gina Gregory said Monday she was not sure if it would be taken up today.

"We're still polling council members," she said.

The moratorium would halt efforts to build a 13,000-square-foot CVS Pharmacy at the southwest corner of Old Shell and McGregor. The Village group and CVS developers are trying to resolve a major issue: the proximity of the store to the street, according to Village President Linda St. John.

"We're being advised by our urban planners that it is very crucial to the whole integrity of our plan," she said, adding that her group wants to work with developers.

Gregory said that she has talked with CVS developers — The Mitchell Company — and learned CVS won't budge from its plans to build away from the street and place parking in front of the store.

St. John said members of the Village group planned to attend today's meeting to support the moratorium and respond to the Realtors association letter, which was sent to the council Friday.

The association's 12-member board is not opposed to the Village group or its plans, according to Sandy Purvis of Roberts Brothers in Saraland, president of the Realtor group.

"The board is in support of private property rights," she said. "We voted on information presented to us by several of the board members."

Johnny Roberts, president of Roberts Brothers, who favors the moratorium, said he felt that the board should have invited a Village group representative to answer questions.

Some of his agents have asked him to sign their petition, he said, but he declined. "I feel like I can be a significant help between the two groups," he said. "We need to bring people together, not pick sides."

Board treasurer Melissa Morrissette of LL&B Real Estate said that she was ill and missed the meeting during which the letter was approved. "If it had been known there was to be a vote, I'm sure other people would have wanted to be present," she said. "I think it's very controversial."

Morrissette noted that "a lot of work and money" have gone into the master plan.

The plan will be presented to the City Council and city staff members on Jan. 29 by town planners Dover, Kohl & Partners of Coral Gables, Fla., according to St. John. The plan will also be submitted to the zoning agencies for approval, which could take as long as four months, she said.

Lee Metzger, a Realtor board member, said, "We don't think moratoriums are a good way to accomplish" the Village group's goals. "We look forward to seeing what they propose.... But there have not been any specifics provided."

The board voted unanimously to oppose the moratorium, Metzger said.

A moratorium would delay the start of a residential project that Roberts has planned at Old Shell and Bit 'n Spur. "It's costing me some money," he said. "But I feel like it's important enough to put my development on the back burner until we make sure this plan is addressed."