

East Columbia's growth guidelines

Council considers staff plan before making major development decision

By Paul Weber and David Reed

This is the big picture the City Council will examine next month: a guidebook prepared by city and county planners for future growth in east Columbia, an area spreading across 21 square miles south of Interstate 70 and east of US Highway 63 that is largely undeveloped.

This is the practical application of those guidelines that Council members will face a week later: a request by Richland Road Properties to annex and rezone 271 acres of Boone County land within the study area that's now designated for agriculture use and single-family housing.

The developers want permission to eventually build commercial centers and relatively dense residential areas in a section near the approved route for a highway connecting I-70 and the east end of Stadium Boulevard.

If approved, and if proposed roads are actually built, the land could be developed into hundreds of thousands of square feet of office and retail space and a maximum of 1,000 dwelling units, mostly single-family houses with some allowances for condos and apartments.

Robert Hollis, the attorney representing Richland Road Properties, said if the City Council once again declines to approve their request, the five contiguous tracts might end up being parceled into smaller areas and developed piecemeal.

"We are trying to engage in large-scale, long-term planning," Hollis said.

So is the city and county, which is why Council members voted in July to put off their decision until the East Area Plan was finished.

The request by Richland Road Properties to develop its large tract of land will be the first of many to come as the city expands to the east and the Council is called on to manage growth using the long-range, comprehensive guidelines drafted by the urban planners.

Patrick Zenner, the city's development services manager, said the East Area Plan was produced to provide guidance for the development community and residents as to what may or may not be acceptable in this entire area.

"Not often has this community seen an active effort to engage two political entities on a single common activity that will define its development destiny," Zenner wrote in an e-mail, "much less engage the public so robustly in that activity."

It was not, he stressed, commissioned just to help determine the fate of the Richland Road Properties case.

Developer David Atkins first filed the annexation and rezoning petition in November 2008, and the company modified the proposal before and after the City Planning and Zoning Commission recommended denial of the project in October 2009.

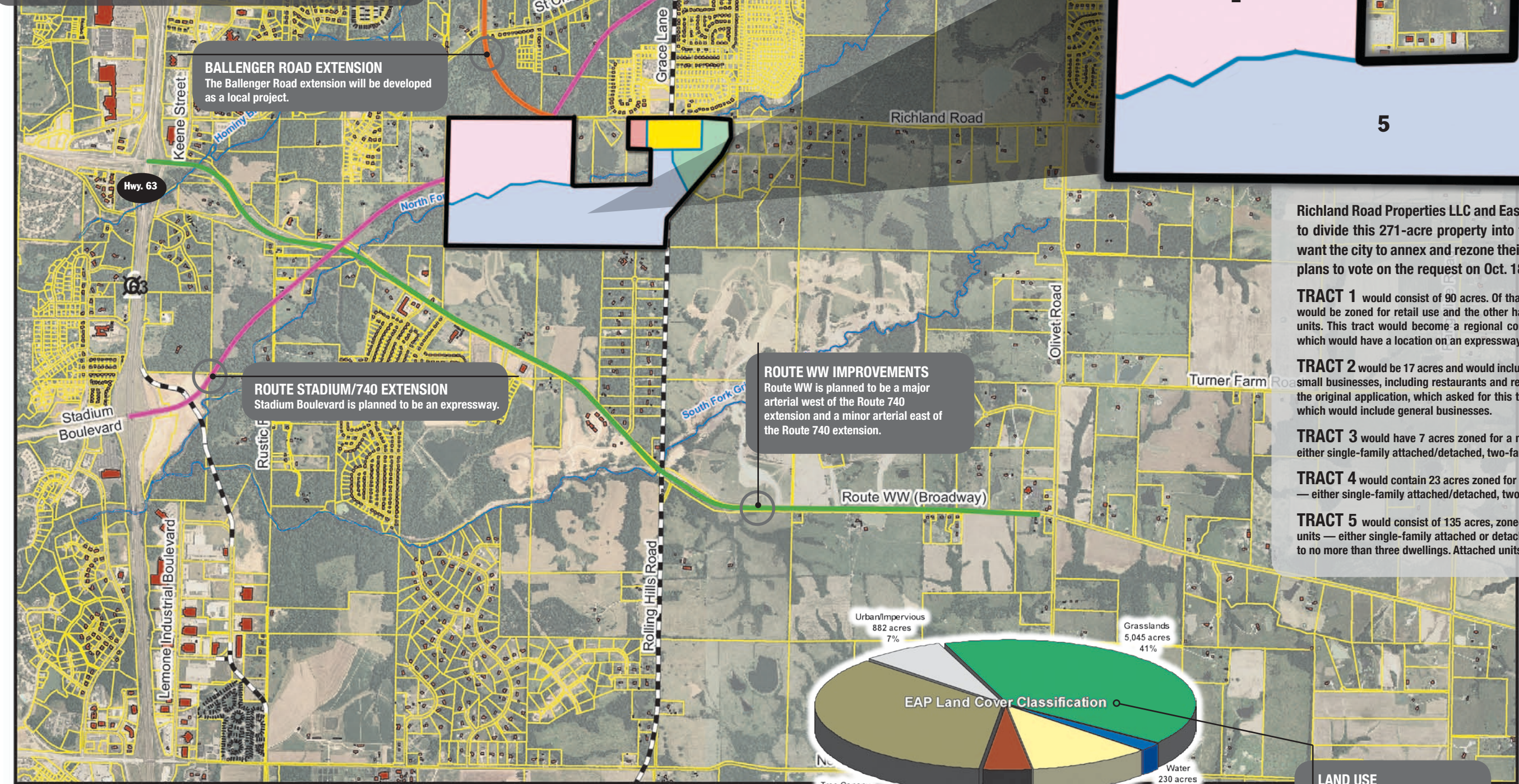
In opposing the development plan, the city staff and the P&Z Commission cited concerns that the proposal was predicated on road construction that remains uncertain, included density too great and placed commercial property in inappropriate locations. Overall, the opponents said the request was premature and set a bad example for future long-range planning efforts.

"We're not here to make life more difficult; rather, we're trying to anticipate what is most necessary to sustain the quality of life that attracts many to this community," Zenner said. "Without sound planning policies regarding development, which this plan offers, we stand to lose a whole lot more."

Mayor Bob McDavid and the majority of the Council, which has become more development-friendly since the plan was rejected, supported the production of the long-range plan but insisted that Richland Road Properties deserved to have its request voted up or down by Oct. 18.

The East Area Plan covers an area containing roughly 21 square miles, or 13,446 acres. The study area is bounded on the north by Interstate 70 and on the west by US Highway 63. The interior of the study area is bisected east-west generally by three primary roads: Richland Road, State Route WW and New Haven Road along the southern boundary.

Traversing the East Area north to south are St. Charles Road, Rolling Hills Road, Olivet Road and Rangeline Road/Route Z, the area's eastern boundary. Within these boundaries are six watersheds that include the Hinkson Creek, the Hominy Branch Creek, the Grindstone Creek, the Clear Creek, the Gans Creek and the Cedar Creek. All but the Cedar Creek watershed flow through the study area to the southwest. Cedar Creek flows to the southeast.



Richland Road Properties LLC and East Richland Roads LLC want to divide this 271-acre property into five tracts. The developers want the city to annex and rezone their property. The City Council plans to vote on the request on Oct. 18.

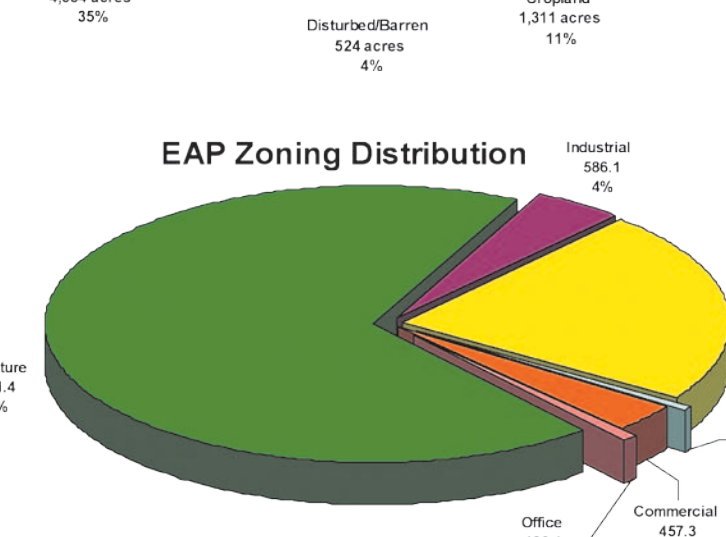
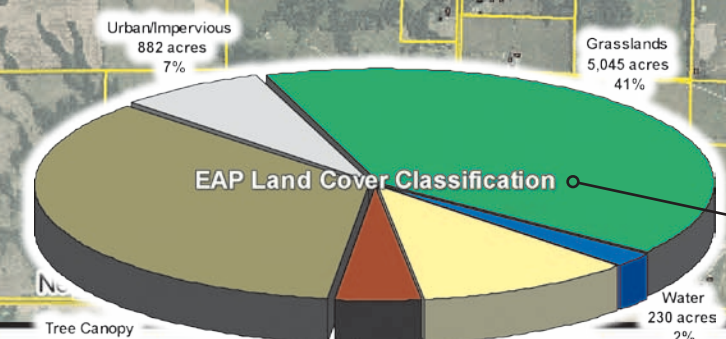
TRACT 1 would consist of 90 acres. Of that, half — 360,000 square feet — would be zoned for retail use and the other half for office use or 300 dwelling units. This tract would become a regional commercial or employment center, which would have a location on an expressway or freeway.

TRACT 2 would be 17 acres and would include C-1 uses, which includes most small businesses, including restaurants and retail stores. This is a change from the original application, which asked for this tract to be zoned for all C-3 uses, which would include general businesses.

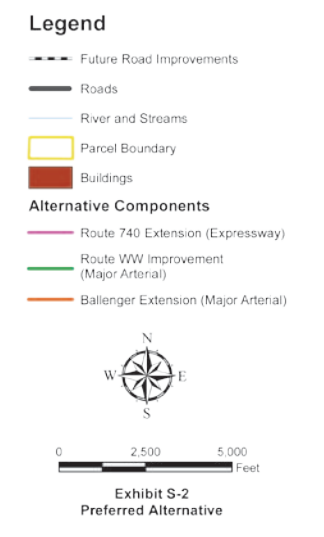
TRACT 3 would have 7 acres zoned for a maximum of 46 dwelling units — either single-family attached/detached, two-family villas or multi-family.

TRACT 4 would contain 23 acres zoned for a maximum of 116 dwelling units — either single-family attached/detached, two-family villas or multi-family.

TRACT 5 would consist of 135 acres, zoned for a maximum of 538 dwelling units — either single-family attached or detached and attached units restricted to no more than three dwellings. Attached units could limit land disturbance.



LAND USE
The East Columbia study area, covering 21 square miles and 12,346 acres, is primarily rural. Here's the breakdown: 5,045 acres grassland, or 41 percent; 4,354 acres tree canopy, or 35 percent; 1,311 acres cropland, or 11 percent; 882 acres urban/impervious surface, or 7 percent; 524 acres disturbed/barren, or 4 percent; and 230 acres water, or 2 percent.



So the timetable for the East Area Plan was moved up in time for the city and county P&Z commissions to consider the draft document in a joint meeting on Sept. 30 and for the City Council to check it out during an Oct. 11 pre-Council meeting before it comes up for a public hearing and a vote.

The study, a collaboration of city and county planners with area residents and other stakeholders, covers land use, environmental concerns, utility coverage and infrastructure. They held five public meetings and summarized the sentiments.

Residents of neighboring properties who expressed their views largely spoke against the land use proposed by

Richland Road Properties and feared dense development, an increase in crime and a loss of aesthetic value, among other changes. Many are apprehensive about the loss of their rural lifestyle.

However, Hollis pointed out that the rezoning request is not the blueprint for a series of office buildings or a strip mall but merely a request for permission to build those things. Construction on the property in question is dependent on the proposed extensions of Stadium/740 to the northeast Rolling Hills Road, north of Route WW to Richland Road, and Grace Lane to I-70.

The federal Environmental Impact Statement is finished, the Federal

Highway Administration approved the highway route in June, and on Sept. 1 the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission gave its approval, though it noted that there is no funding available to actually build the highway in the foreseeable future.

The development agreement attached to the request says development is limited to "that which is supported by sufficient roadways and infrastructure." Hollis previously pointed out that "all infrastructure is available to this site except adequate roadways," a position backed in the East Area Plan.

(continued on Page 32)

Exhibit S-2 Preferred Alternative