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Massive Platinum Triangle expansion halted

A lawsuit prompts Anaheim to hold off on plans to quintuple the office space and double the number of homes.

By SARAH TULLY and ERIC CARPENTER

The Orange County Register

ANAHEIM – The city has agreed to put the brakes on plans to drastically expand a downtown-like area around Angel Stadium after a lawsuit challenged the development.

The City Council twice approved plans to quintuple the amount of office space and add thousands of more homes than originally anticipated in the Platinum Triangle, which the city hopes to turn into an urban neighborhood of condos, cafes and office towers.

But two citizens groups sued the city, saying officials failed to adequately study the potential strain on traffic, water, air and other services.

Now, before the case plays out in a courtroom, city officials have agreed that the study was "defective" and plan to start over, City Attorney Jack White said.

"It speaks to what a complete failure the planning process was if they have to go back to the drawing board here," said Eric Altman, executive director of Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development, one of the groups that sued.

The council is expected to rescind its approval and reconsider the plan after a new study is completed in six to nine months, White said.

Up to 16.8 million square feet of office space – the size of almost four Sears Towers – would be permitted in the plan. The maximum commercial space would equal the size of two South Coast Plazas.

Also permitted would be to 18,363 housing units.

"We certainly felt we were in compliance," Mayor Curt Pringle said. "But there were a lot of legal issues brought up and – not to say that they all have merit – but at a time when there's not a lot of development going on there, we felt it's in our best interest to step back and make sure."

Councilman Bob Hernandez, who previously supported the plan, said it's impossible to know how new environmental studies might affect how the council would vote on a revised plan.

Pringle, who also supported the previous plan, said, "I supported it before and, unless something changes in a dramatic or awkward way based on further study, I still support the premise."

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The council initially approved the expansion plan in December, the day after the Planning Commission backed it. After a legal challenge, the council held another hearing in April and approved the plan again.

The city's latest decision is expected to have little practical impact on the short-term construction of the 820-acre Triangle.

Three projects would be forbidden from starting construction. But those projects and some others, including Lennar's 2,681-home village, already are on hold because of the market slowdown.

Meanwhile, a half-dozen or so construction projects continue on; some condominium and apartment complexes are completed. Various developers have plans targeted for the Triangle.

"We're just trying to get the (study) redone while there's not a whole lot of demand for housing at this time," White said. "We're trying to redo it before that demand pops up again."

Representatives from the citizens' groups said they hope the city now will make changes to accommodate increases in traffic and the need for water and parks.

"We'll have the chance to persuade them to make the changes we think they should make," said Cory Briggs, attorney for Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development.

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