

Gauging Woodward's possible relocation



Magnolia Drive at the moment dead-ends at the Link-N-Greens golf course. Woodward would build a full-turn access point at the intersection. Molly Armbrister

Here's a breakdown:

Molly Armbrister

FORT COLLINS — The potential for a new Woodward Inc. headquarters on the Link-N-Greens golf course has created a great deal of buzz — as well as work for city planners, engineers and others. A slew of changes are in store should the project move forward.

Traffic patterns surrounding the 101.5-acre property, changes to Downtown Development Authority boundaries and protecting the Poudre are just some of the topics getting a lot of attention.

Protecting the Poudre

The project sits within the floodplain of the Poudre River, something that Woodward will work to change if the project moves forward. As reported by the Business Report, re-grading is likely to occur if Woodward expects to obtain the green light from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Beyond that, the project has the potential to interfere with the Poudre River, but the company has been in discussions with both the city and with environmental group Save the Poudre to enhance the river instead.

"I'm initially optimistic," Gary Wockner of Save the Poudre said. "I think this will be more beneficial than some of the other proposed projects (throughout the city)."

So far, talks between the two groups have been preliminary, but additional discussions are in the works.

Woodward is working to include river restoration in its plans, according to Lindsay Ex, environmental planner for the city.

Specifically, the company will be working to restore a "natural meander" that was removed from the river when the golf course was constructed, according to Bruce Hendee, chief sustainability officer for the city.

The property encompasses about 100 acres, Hendee said, and about 30 of those will remain open space, most of which is located along the river.

In addition, Woodward will restore some of the area's native grasses and will include a pond meant to attract wildlife.

Many of the ideas being discussed will work to accomplish some of the city's goals for that area of the Poudre, creating a "continuous landscape buffer" between buildings and the river.

At its current location, Woodward is known for its vast lawns and trees, so it stands to reason that the company would continue in the tradition of incorporating plentiful landscape into plans for a new headquarters.

Dealing with more traffic

The streets around a new Woodward HQ are already busy and would become even busier.

The Link-N-Greens property sits near the intersection of three relatively large roads, one of which, Mulberry Street, connects to Interstate 25.

Lemay and Riverside avenues also run next to the property, as does Lincoln Avenue, a much smaller street where Fort Collins Brewery and Odell Brewing Co. are located. Across Lemay Avenue sit a Wal-Mart, Home Depot and a variety of other retail businesses.

At community meetings hosted for residents of nearby neighborhoods, some people voiced concerns about an increase in traffic on the already-busy streets.

The golf course is not far from the interstate, but the direct access provided by Mulberry would help large vehicles transporting goods to and from Woodward avoid residential neighborhoods.

On the other hand, there would no doubt be an increase in traffic in the area, as Woodward is one of the region's largest employers, with 1,200 employees in Fort Collins and Loveland.

The city has estimated that a Woodward headquarters on the property would generate about 9,000 trips per day, according to Joe Olson, city traffic engineer.

Manufacturers do not generate as many trips as some other types of businesses, according to Olson. Woodward has also said that, of course, there would be some additional truck traffic in the area due to its presence, Olson said.

Perhaps the biggest physical change for the roads will be the addition of a driveway at Magnolia Drive and Lemay Avenue.

An overall development plan submitted to the city shows new full-turn access available at the intersection. Right now, Magnolia Drive dead-ends at the edge of the golf course.

More TIF dollars for DDA

The Link-N-Greens, a privately owned golf course, is surrounded on three sides by the current boundary of the Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority.

The DDA studied the question of expansion of its boundary in 2009, determining that the Link-N-Greens area

has the zoning and development potential that matches the DDA's mission, said Todd Dangerfield, project manager for the DDA.

A formal petition requesting the inclusion of the Link-N-Greens property into the DDA boundary has not been submitted, Dangerfield said, but getting one approved shouldn't be too difficult.

DDA statutes are written to make amending its boundary simple, he said, something that has been requested about a dozen times since 1981.

Including an area as large as a new Woodward headquarters could mean good things for the DDA's budget, which was cut as a result of a change in state statute beginning last year.

Shifting the boundary to include the Woodward project would mean that the DDA could collect tax increment financing from the project.

In general, TIF dollars are generated by taxes collected from enhanced property values. When a TIF district is established, all governmental entities continue to receive the same level of tax revenues they had always collected. But all incremental increases in tax revenue are "captured" by the district to help pay for the improvements, typically for a period of 30 years.

This means that the amount of TIF collected is dependent upon the improvements to a given property.

Because Woodward has not yet submitted its plans, it's too soon to tell how much the project could benefit the DDA.

If the DDA borders are shifted to include the property, Woodward would be able to make a proposal to the DDA board to consider an investment in public facility improvements including utility upgrades or road improvements that occur in the public right-of-way.