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# MORGAN COUNTY CITIZEN

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**Council OKs purchase of Gilmore property for \$87,500**

Submitted by editor on Tue, 10/02/2012 - 18:22. [More News & Features](#)

By Stephanie Johns  
Staff Writer

The Madison City Council spent much of their time during their work session Monday evening talking about the proposed purchase of the Gilmore property located at 473 Burney St. in the Canaan neighborhood. They then voted to purchase the property for \$87,500 and subsequently transfer it over to the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) during their meeting.

Chairman Michael Naples spoke on behalf of DDA Chair Shandon Land and urged the council to approve the purchase. He said that the DDA has an urban renewal plan for the property as well as a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and that improvements to the property should help alleviate a drainage problem in the area from 5th Street to Pearl, down Whitehall and along Route 83.

Naples shared statistics he said were gathered during his campaigning over the years. Of the 4,000 residents in Madison, Naples said that 49 percent are of a minority and 19 percent are elderly, with a majority of these residents living in the Canaan neighborhood.

The CDBG "gives them hope" and that the DDA has a "pretty good record of success," he said. He added that the DDA has no intention of running a business, rather they hope to find partners and grant money.

Naples shared several possible uses for the main building on the property and said that it could be used to house a grocery, a dry cleaners or even a barber shop.

Naples addressed those who might oppose the purchase and subsequent transfer of the property and said their thinking might be different than the thinking of those who live in the Canaan neighborhood.

Councilman Fred Perriman said that he and the others in the neighborhood would "like to see progress come back."

"It's the best thing that can happen to that community," he said. "The community itself is behind this project."

Councilman Joe DiLetto said he was concerned with how this project would mesh with Sanford's project. In December of last year developer Sandy Sanford gave the DDA five building lots in exchange for building a mixed-housing planned development near East Jefferson Street.

"I'm concerned about overkill but I can see one helping the other," he said. He added that he had concerns about traffic but sees that any businesses located in the house wouldn't have to depend on drive-by traffic. Madison Planning Director Monica Callahan said that the Gilmore property will have a smaller footprint than the Sanford project and that it would not jeopardize the other project.

Sherry Terrell, a local realtor who acted as a consultant to the DDA for this project, said that the residential aspect - the property will have two or three units upstairs - is expected to carry the property.

She added that the community is underserved, "Madison is growing all around us. That part of the community has not been touched."

When asked by Mayor Bruce Gilbert whether or not the project would require a zoning change, Naples said that it would not. When Gilbert asked about the "total commitment" to purchase the property, Naples said he did not know, "That's not my area."

As to an exit strategy, Naples said that he was not too concerned, "Maybe a private individual will come along."

Callahan said that the DDA has a four to six year exit strategy and that she has been asked to speak with a potential investor about the property's potential. DiLetto said he wanted to quickly find a management company for the property and Callahan said that the DDA already had discussed this.



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The project sounded "very doable," according to DiLetto. "There are some good opportunities. I still have misgivings about it."

Gilbert agreed with DiLetto and said, "We have to be concerned about it. Not many new businesses make it."

Callahan said that already she has looked into grants to be used to improve the property. One grant, if they applied for and were awarded it, would be used to improve the parking lot, which she said would run around \$35,000.

Another grant, the Small Business Loan Fund, could gain the project between \$40,000 and \$50,000. Callahan said the money would stay at the city level and could be used as a small business revolving fund.

Callahan said that the DDA has had the Gilmore property on its radar "for a long time," "It didn't approach feasibility until it dropped below \$100,000," she said.

Alexander said the property was on the market for one year and nine months.

Perriman asked City Manager David Nunn whether or not they would be able to use \$500,000 of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) money on the property and Nunn said yes. Perriman said those funds would be used to deal with the stormwater problem.

He later explained that whenever it rains, the homes in that area "flood out."

The money Perriman spoke of would be used to restructure underground water pipes in that area of the neighborhood.

Councilman Whitey Hunt asked Callahan if a private individual could buy the property and qualify for grants. Callahan said no. Hunt said he thought a business might do better on Route 83 than on the proposed property.

Gilbert asked about the possibility of a grocery store on the property selling beer and wine. Naples said that most neighbors of the property would oppose it and that he envisions it free of beer and wine.

City Attorney Joe Reitman asked about the property's proximity to a school.

Gilbert said that it's "a long way off."According to the 2010 Georgia Code, alcoholic beverages cannot be sold within 100 yards of a church building or within 200 yards of a school.

Resident Laura Butler wanted to know whether or not future owners of the property could sell beer and wine. Reitman said that "that potential exists."

Callahan said that once they purchase the property and transfer it to the DDA that the DDA could restrict tenants from selling beer and wine. Reitman added that they could look into the possibility of adding a deed restriction prohibiting future owners of the property from selling beer and wine.

Towards the end of the discussion Naples asked those present to consider what the residents of the neighborhood want.

"Put yourself in the shoes of the people who live there," he said. "With the CBDG they think their neighborhood can make it."

Hunt voted to oppose the purchase of the property while all other council members voted in favor of the purchase.

Printed in the September 27, 2012 edition

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