



TULSA URBAN WILDERNESS COALITION

For immediate release

WHAT: TULSA URBAN WILDERNESS COALITION Acknowledges Meeting With Representatives From Simon Property Group, Finds Plan Lacking In Important Details

WHEN: Monday February 23, 2015

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Following a meeting with representatives from Simon Property Group – the developers of an outlet mall proposed on the west side of a south Tulsa wilderness area – the Tulsa Urban Wilderness Coalition has found their plan to be lacking in necessary details to explain how the real estate giant will safeguard Tulsa's largest green space and deal with the expected traffic and drainage problems the shopping center would create.

According to TUWC Public Relations Coordinator, Laurie Biby, representatives of the Tulsa Urban Wilderness Coalition met with representatives from Simon Property Group recently regarding a proposed outlet mall atop Tulsa's popular urban wilderness area, Turkey Mountain. Several TUWC members, including Government Affairs Coordinator Colin Tawney, attended the meeting. The meeting left the TUWC representatives with the impression that Simon has overlooked important considerations to the community by hastening the development process in an attempt to beat out two other competing outlet mall projects.

Both the Cherokee Nation and Horizon Group, the developer of The Outlet Shoppes at Oklahoma City, have announced competing projects. The Cherokee project would be on land adjacent to the tribe's existing Hard Rock development in Catoosa. Horizon has announced intentions to build an outlet mall near the intersection of I-44 and I-244 in east Tulsa. People following these projects, including Tulsa's director of economic development, Clay Bird, have expressed skepticism that two outlet developments would be feasible, let alone three.

"We sincerely appreciate Simon's attempt at reaching out to stakeholders, but I'm afraid in the rush to be the first to get concrete poured, Simon is overlooking issues which are critical to public safety and the public interest," Tawney said.

"We pressed them in our meeting what their plan was to deal with additional traffic east of their development and they had no answer. This issue was raised again by planning officials at the Planning Review Committee at INCOG the following day and still, there either seems to be a lack of detail or concern. I believe the public interest would be well-served by Simon stepping back, slowing down, and giving serious consideration to what heavy commercial development means in an area with very rural infrastructure," Tawney continued.

Plans released by Simon call for construction of a six lane bridge over Highway 75 and expanding the roadway to the entrance of Simon's proposed development. Just east of that entrance, the plan shows West 61st Street abruptly tapering back to two lanes.

The roadway in question is a narrow road which travels east as 61st Street from U.S. Highway 75 and turns into Elwood atop a sharp turn into a steep descent to 71st Street below. With the ever-increasing popularity of Turkey Mountain in recent years, weekends find the main parking area as well as area streets overrun with people wanting to explore, run, or ride their steed of choice- a mountain bike or horse.

Representatives from Simon stated at the planning review committee meeting they had completed traffic and environmental studies, but copies have not been provided to the TUWC for review and were not presented at last week's Planning Commission meeting.

Trail users have been assured the planning process would be open for their input and that Simon would attempt to be a good neighbor, offering access to trails within a development buffer zone. Tawney says details of this provision are still scant. The proposed development is on a private 60-acre tract bordered by the Westside YMCA to the north and land to the east which has recently been reported to have ties to the George Kaiser Family Foundation and reputedly safe from future development.

"When we questioned the Simon representatives about provisions for additional parking and trail head access, the Simon reps stated they were going to approach the GKFF about creating more parking and new trail head access on their property immediately to the east. I explained to the Simon representatives that destruction of even more wilderness to support their development would not be well received by trail users," Tawney said.

He continued: "For one thing, we cannot get behind tearing up even more of the Turkey Mountain wilderness to support commercial development. Another issue is, looking at the roadway sight lines east of this property where this is proposed, it would create a serious traffic hazard to users of such a proposed parking area. I was left with the impression that their stated interest in integrating with existing trail systems, as prescribed by planners, is barely an afterthought which is disappointing. Their only priority seems to become the developer who gets the first outlet mall open rather than quality development."

Tawney concluded by saying: "We don't seem to be the only people who have observed this. Even city councilors are now on record saying they are concerned with Simon's lack of plan detail. As a simple matter of our zoning code requiring development to be in harmony with the surrounding existing and future development objectives of neighboring property, there is no method of 'low impact' development practices which can make an outlet mall harmonize with wilderness and a YMCA camp."

"Based upon an in-depth review of Simon's plans, their lack of follow up detail, and how these plans do not respect the surrounding properties and their future intended use, Tulsa Urban Wilderness Coalition cannot support Simon's development plans and requests for public tax incentives for this site. We wish Simon well in the Tulsa market but feel it is unfortunate they selected this site without apparent consideration for what pristine urban wilderness means to not just Tulsa, but the entire region," TUWC public relations coordinator Laurie Biby said.

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