

# Huge South Side project OK'd

**Council allows big-box store but adds conditions**

By Rob O'Dell  
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A big-box store, a biosciences park and an upscale housing subdivision on 350 acres on the South Side were given final approval by the

City Council on Tuesday.

The vote ended two years of torturous negotiations and controversy over the development, which is likely to feature Wal-Mart as its main tenant.

Most council members lauded the project as an example of what can happen when the developer, council members and the community work together.

Councilwoman Karin Uhlich, the lone dissenter in the 6-1 vote, had a different view,

saying the big-box store would have negative effects far beyond the neighborhood where it's located.

About a half-dozen neighborhood residents spoke in strong favor of the project, saying it would bring jobs and shopping to an area that needs both.

Councilwoman Nina Trasoff, who expressed concerns identical to Uhlich's, said she wrestled with the decision so much that she didn't know how she

was going to vote as she began speaking. In the end, because the area's residents wanted it so badly, Trasoff said she would "hold my nose and vote yes."

Dubbed The Bridges, the project calls for a big-box store as part of 110 acres for a "power center" — to include 1 million square feet of retail space. The big-box store will likely be a Wal-Mart, but that is not specified in the plans.

It also proposes 110 acres for an upscale KB Home housing development and a 65-acre biosciences park to be developed by the University of Arizona. The site is bounded generally by South Kino Parkway, East 36th Street, Interstate 10 and South Park Avenue.

Trasoff said the big-box has to be a Wal-Mart because no other company negotiates in

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the way this developer, Eastbourne Investments Ltd., did with the city. She said Eastbourne turned the negotiations into "hardball and manipulation."

Trasoff said Target Corp. has agreed in at least two Tucson sites to abide by the big-box ordinance, which limits the size of a grocery section to no more than 10 percent of a retail store larger than 100,000 square feet. Eastbourne, by contrast, sought an exception to the ordinance as a condition for the company to even submit its proposal to the city for review.

Councilman Steve Leal, who was the lead negotiator because the project is in his ward, laid out six criteria for not enforcing the city's big-box ordinance in Eastbourne's planned area development.

Those are: The project is vital and has extraordinary benefits to the community; the surrounding area is depressed economically; the area is a fed-

eral empowerment zone and a state enterprise zone; the site is the single most important development location for the area; the site has stood unused for decades; and it's next to a major highway.

Leal said those criteria would be used when deciding other development requests to ensure the city's big-box ordinance stays intact, despite this approval.

Leal touted the extra conditions put on Eastbourne, which included \$2 million to pay for job training, business-assistance programs, neighborhood improvements, economic-improvement grants to area nonprofit organizations and improvements for pedestrian access and roads. That money will be matched with \$4.5 million the city expects from construction sales taxes at the site.

Jim Portner, the project's representative, said the vote makes the project a reality.

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