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Advocates promote housing ideas for Englewood

Proposal aimed at helping seniors age in place, but some residents want City Council to say no

By Mike Genet
mike.genet@examiner.net

Organizers for a proposed overlay zoning ordinance in the Englewood neighborhood – a plan that has both advocates and opponents among the local residents – recently

received a significant endorsement.

The Missouri chapter of AARP sent an endorsement letter to Englewood Arts late in January, saying that it supports housing initiatives that allow for accessory dwelling units and small houses.

Advocates say the proposed overlay zoning, which extends into the neighborhoods surrounding the Englewood Arts District on Winner Road in western Independence, is not a rezoning and would not replace existing zoning. Instead, it provides

additional small residential options such as an accessory unit or tiny house that artists, other young professionals and age-in-place retirees might find more appealing. It can help fill vacant lots and also ward off outside investors from continuing to

swoop in and buy properties, they say.

“I’ve lived here for decades, so I have a lot of emotional and financial interest,” said Terry Snapp, 81, who is president of the

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Straighter, wider Lee’s Summit Road is in the works

Twisty parts south of Independence are being addressed; project runs to fall 2025

By Mike Genet
mike.genet@examiner.net

After groundbreaking last August, the first project of a long-anticipated plan to reconstruct and widen Lee’s Summit Road south of Independence is slated to last into the fall of 2025.

For several months, Lee’s Summit Road has been closed between Anderson Drive, near the Little Blue Trace Trail trailhead, and Lakewood Boulevard, with access only for local residents and traffic for the Space Center Summit caves.

Kansas City Public Works is handling the \$9.3 million project, which will happen in two phases. The first is Lakewood Boulevard to the caves, in which crews will realign the road to remove dangerous curves through a wooded area. The second phase is the flat portion from the caves to Anderson.

Although road improvements have happened to the north and south of this project over the past decade, Lee’s Summit Road



Crews have been moving utility poles as part of Kansas City Public Works’ project to widen Lee’s Summit Road between Lakewood Boulevard and Anderson Drive, just south of Independence. The road, seen here from the entrance to the Space Center Summit caves, has been closed since August 2023 and will remain closed until the fall of 2025. [Mike Genet/The Examiner]

See ROAD, Page A8

Gambling digs more deeply into Kansas City

Addiction experts warn that sports betting apps and in-game wagering pose a particularly addictive temptation that can add up to trouble for problem gamblers

By Suzanne King
Kansas City Beacon

When Andrew Gallamore clocks out of work at his job in Bonner Springs, he clicks on his phone. Sometimes, to bet.

His DraftKings app

makes dropping \$5 or \$10 on a prop bet so easy. And once he’s back home in Missouri, having even a few dollars riding on how many yards a player may rack up running or passing makes watching sports that

much better. “It makes the game,” he said, “way more exciting.”

His bets are among the \$2.8 billion wagered in Kansas since the state legalized sports betting in September 2022. And

among the \$300 billion in bets placed nationwide since 2018, when the U.S. Supreme Court said every state had the right to legalize the pastime.

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At the sportsbook at Hollywood Casino at Kansas Speedway, gamblers can make sports bets. (Suzanne King/The Beacon)

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NEWS

Biden criticizes Israel's Gaza offensive

Akyla Gardner and
Jordan Fabian
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Joe Biden criticized the extent of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, as tension builds over Israeli plans to push into Rafah, where more than 1 million people have sought refuge.

"The conduct of the response in the Gaza Strip has been over the top," Biden said Thursday at the White House. "There are a lot of innocent people who are starving. A lot of innocent people who are in trouble and dying.

And it's got to stop."

The president's comments marked an escalation in his criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's prosecution of the war against Hamas. They came after the Israeli leader previewed plans for ground forces to enter the city of Rafah, which lies to the south of Gaza and near the Palestinian territory's border with Egypt.

Israel launched airstrikes in the area overnight, killing at least eight Palestinians, the Associated Press reported Friday.

The White House expressed concern

about the fate of refugees gathered in and around Rafah, saying it would not support an offensive that did not account for the impact on civilians.

A military operation there right now would be a "disaster for those people and it's not something that we would support," US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

Rafah is the main point of entry for aid coming from Egypt. The south of the strip is where around half of Gaza's 2.3 million people fled to in the early part of the war as Israel concentrated

its assault on Gaza City in the north.

At the White House, Biden said he's pressured the Israeli government to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza. His administration is working toward a sustained pause in military operations to allow for the release of hostages taken by Hamas, designated a terrorist group by the US and European Union.

The Iran-backed group killed 1,200 people when its militants broke out of Gaza and rampaged through southern Israel on Oct. 7. Israel's retaliatory air and ground offensive has killed

more than 27,000 people in Gaza, according to health officials in the Hamas-run territory.

"I'm pushing very hard now to deal with this hostage ceasefire," the president said. "If we could get that initial delay, I think that we would be able to extend that so that we can increase the prospect that this fighting in Gaza changes."

Hamas fighters abducted about 250 people during their incursion. Roughly 100 hostages were freed during an earlier, week-long truce that ended on Dec. 1.

The fate of the

remaining captives is dominating political discussion in Israel. The Israeli military has said that of the 136 still in Gaza, 31 are dead.

The death toll in Gaza has raised international pressure on Israel to bring the fighting to an end. It has also caused political complications for Biden ahead of the November presidential election, in which he is seeking a second term. In some swing states such as Michigan, Biden's losing support among Arab- and Muslim-Americans for not doing more to stop the war.

ENGLEWOOD

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nonprofit. "We've been advocates of this neighborhood. For elderly people to have a place to age in place, this would be perfect scenario. It's accommodating for that."

When the Englewood Arts nonprofit, a group of local and interested citizens and Englewood Arts Center directors, first presented the proposed overlay district in August, the Planning Commission voted

to postpone it indefinitely. Some commissioners, including one who owned property in the district, questioned if the hundreds of residents and property owners within the district had sufficient notice.

While the city requires notice of a zoning change hearing to property owners 185 feet outside the boundaries of the land in question, there is no such requirement for those inside the land in question (as most zoning applications are property owned only by the

applicant).

Initially, the proposed overlay district extended east to the Square, but that boundary will be reduced to Lexington Avenue/Chrysler Avenue just west of the Community of Christ Auditorium. The western boundary is Brookside Avenue, and it extends north to Truman Road and south to 23rd Street.

A group of citizen opponents who also live in the surrounding neighborhoods or own property there raised objections at this week's City Council meeting.

They distributed flyers claiming the overlay district is an attempt to sell the neighborhood to "unelected bureaucrats," presented a resolution guaranteeing citizen property rights they believe would be harmed by the overlay district, asking city officials to sign it.

Leigh Phillips said the Planning Commission's decision in August was the proper move, as she said the overlay district would take away property rights.

Mary Wilcox, who owns a rental property a couple blocks south of Winner Road, said there was not near enough notice before the matter went to the Planning Commission.

"The fact that they could come in and say, 'We're going to change your life' -- they just want to start stacking tiny houses," she said. "Who's going to buy it?"

Council Member John Perkins, whose district includes the land in question, said the base zoning would still exist.

"The overlay would allow for different uses, and you would still have to go through the permit process," he said. "It's just to create more activity, and it can allow auxiliary dwelling units and can lead to more infill."

Perkins said he has not personally heard negative feedback about the overlay district.

"That's not to say it doesn't exist," he said, "but no one has reached out to me."

Englewood Arts directors Michael Baxley and Teresa Dorsch said they sent postcards and

shared invitations with residents about the overlay zoning and continue to do so.

Dorsch said the group plans to return to the Planning Commission with a revised application, but not for a couple months. It would also need City Council approval. In addition to the boundary change, they're tweaking to add provisions or close potential loopholes about noise, occupancy, parking and allowed businesses.

The opposition they hear, she said, is "frustrating."

"It's misunderstanding about the intent and the overlay," she said. "This is not just one person writing this document; this is people from here."

Tami Parsons, owner of B-Vogue Salon in Englewood, said the group is trying to reverse a decades-long trend -- more than 200 lost homes in the past 20 years, she said, with just one new build.

"It's not about degrading the neighborhood," she said. "It's celebrating the good in it."

Longtime neighborhood resident Jason White said the proposed zoning would have allowed him and his wife to have a small home for her mother in her later years, and before zoning restrictions enacted decades ago.

Said area artist GK Callahan, "It's not taking anything away from anybody. We're not controlling what they're doing. It's filling vacant lots and allowing more possibilities for more people."

Emily Martinez, a fledgling artist who graduated from William Christman three years ago, said she's excited about

the residential possibilities from an overlay district.

"I'll have a place to buy a home with it happens," she said.

Advocates also note Truman Habitat for Humanity's recent commitment to use grant funds for 10 new homes on vacant lots in Englewood.

"The house next to me is a Habitat house," Callahan said. "It's great for the neighborhood."

Englewood Arts recently applied for some of the last batch of Jackson County's available pandemic relief funds designated for nonprofits. The group received approval for more than \$4 million, though the county has not yet approved allocations, and the application process might have to start over again.

If they are approved for funds, Baxley said, much of it will go toward the Englewood Arts Center building and programming. If they receive funds for density housing, as before, Dorsch said, that can go toward housing opportunities that an overlay district would allow.

Snapp said he believes the overlay can promote a "good positive atmosphere between neighbors" and outlined a dream scenario he would like to have if the overlay zoning goes through.

"Here's what I would love: I tell my wife, 'Hey did you hear about the old Mr. and Mrs. Smith place, they have an art gallery in the home? Let's go see it,'" he said. "Or, let's go eat out, and it's the home of a culinary artist."

"It's an invitation to neighborliness."

ROAD

From Page A1

has remained at two lanes with scant shoulders from Anderson all the way south to Gregory Boulevard near University Health hospital. It will soon have curbs, gutters, enclosed stormwater drainage and

street lighting installed, a 5-foot sidewalk on one side, a 10-foot path on the other and an intermediate turn lane in the center.

Thus far, crews have removed many trees and have been placing new utility poles to reroute lines along what will be a straighter road.

According to KC Public Works, that portion of Lee's

Summit Road averaged 5,200 vehicles daily in 2020, with projected daily use in 2040 up to 6,000 vehicles.

KC Public Works says the next part -- Lakewood Boulevard south to Gregory -- is in the design phase and not slated for construction for a couple of years. Both projects are funded by general obligation bonds.

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