

60/65 development plan gets approval



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN / FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

Councilman Nick Ibarra (left) speaks in opposition to proposed annexation plans as Councilwoman Cindy Rushefsky listens Monday. They were the only no votes on the annexation and rezoning proposals.

Partnership hopes to break ground in three years, finish project in 10.

By Kary Booher
KBOOHER@NEWS-LEADER.COM

The controversial rezoning of a 500-acre spread in southeast Springfield won approval Monday from the City Council, clearing a significant hurdle for what could become a mega retail, business and housing corridor.

In the sharpest debate of its young tenure, the council voted in favor of allowing commercial development in a mostly rural area north of the U.S. 60-65 interchange — and did so after annexing more than 265 acres.

Both votes passed by 7-2 margins in a collective debate that exhausted 65 minutes of a 93-minute session at City Hall. Council members Cindy Rushefsky and Nick Ibarra voted against both proposals.

The rezoning issue, brought by the 60/65 Partnership, does not yet have a developer in place.

But whoever takes the lead will be required to shepherd

each modification through an additional stringent review — the council also amended the language of the proposal Monday night — in front of the Planning and Zoning Commission and the city council.

"It doesn't pin down every detail and frankly I favor that. What it does is stake out the territory — this is a commercial territory," said Mayor Jim O'Neal, the last to speak on the issue. "I believe this is a new way of doing things in Springfield. We have the cart and the horse in the right order."

The council's vote is a win for the 60/65 Partnership, which met with nearby property owners and other concerned groups to tweak the proposal.

Robert B. Murray III, a local real estate broker representing the partnership, said the property required rezoning in order to attract a developer.

The partnership hopes to break ground within three years and complete the project in a

• **Approval** sends a statement that city "is open and willing to do business with large developers." **5A**

decade. The total economic impact of the development could be near \$66 million a year, Murray has said.

The mayor later turned his focus toward Ibarra, who had expressed concerns about eminent domain. O'Neal fired back about property owners' rights, saying a rejection of the proposal would be, "eminent domain in reverse."

"That's exactly what it is," O'Neal said. "Because you are denying them the right to proceed with their property. I don't know how that lines up in a libertarian or conservative environment. But to me, it doesn't. The market should decide how this is decided."

Rushefsky and Ibarra earlier expressed concerns about stretching police-fire protection services. Of eminent domain, Ibarra said, "I think there needs to be more concrete understanding that eminent domain will not be pursued with this development."