

Bryan approves \$2 million in improvements

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By APRIL AVISON

Eagle Staff Writer

The Bryan City Council agreed Tuesday to spend about \$2 million on improvements near the U.S. post office on William Joel Bryan Parkway -- bringing an end to more than two years of negotiation.

The area along William Joel Bryan Parkway and Villa Maria Road, where the improvements will be constructed, is part of a 122-acre tax increment finance zone that was first considered by the City Council in November 2005.

Council members said last year they wanted the city to pay for upgrades within the TIF zone, but did not enter a contract at that time.

Tax increment financing allows cities to issue debt for public improvements, then reimburse the funds through a portion of property taxes on new construction. It is generally used as a mechanism to spark development in an area that isn't growing because it lacks infrastructure.

Officials with Burton Creek Development Limited originally requested \$7 million from the city for the TIF zone, and later lowered the figure to \$5 million. The agreement entered Tuesday commits the city to an even lower dollar figure.

Under the new plan, city officials agreed to spend up to \$1.3 million to build a new street connecting William Joel Bryan Parkway and Villa Maria, about \$289,000 for right of way, \$115,000 for driveway and access improvements at the Bryan post office and \$247,000 for sewer improvements in the area.

At the time the agreement was approved Tuesday evening, a representative from the U.S. Postal Service had not yet signed it -- but city officials said they had received support for the plan via e-mail.

"It's important that the post office agree to this because we're kind of dead in the water [if that approval doesn't come through]," said Councilman Mike Southerland.

Over the past two years, elected officials have debated the merits of the Burton Creek TIF, which was approved in 2006.

The area along William Joel Bryan and Villa Maria already was developing as a residential area when representatives of Burton Creek Development came before the City Council asking for money

in 2005. The region includes some nontaxable property -- such as a church and Blinn College, council members pointed out when debating the subject last year.

But the council eventually threw its support behind the TIF, saying it was necessary to finance Nash Street, a thoroughfare planned to connect William Joel Bryan and Villa Maria.

"For the safety of that neighborhood, it's just something we have to do," Mayor Mark Conlee said in June.

Southerland pointed out Tuesday evening that the public improvements were recommended by an advisory board that has studied the TIF district for the past several months.

Investors of Burton Creek Development, represented by local attorney Chris Peterson, include Neil and Jenny Black, Paul and Ann Leventis, John and Janice Bleyl, Bill and Anthea Kotlan and James and Janice Vogelsang.

Peterson has said the developers are planning retail and office space in the area, in addition to the residential property already under way. The developer's attorney was out of his office Tuesday and could not be reached for comment.

In other matters Tuesday, the City Council:

? Agreed to spend up to \$210,000 on restrooms and parking lot improvements at Travis Athletic Complex, which is leased to the Brazos Valley Bombers summer collegiate baseball team. Southerland cast the only vote against the allocation.

? Approved a \$29,000 change order for modifications to the justice center complex at the corner of 29th Street and Texas Avenue.

? Signed an agreement with Texas A&M University contributing about \$61,000 to Easterwood Airport operations.

? April Avison's e-mail address is april.avison@theeagle.com.