Asylum Lake group to press for business park vote

A large public turnout is expected for tonight's meeting of the Kalamazoo City Commission, which will be voting on two resolutions involving a proposed research and business park.

The resolutions were presented to the commission on April 8 by the Asylum Lake Preservation Association. Association members are asking the city to hold a neighborhood vote on the park plan and to adopt the association's guidelines for the development.

The business park is being proposed by Western Michigan University for two tracts owned by WMU at the intersection of Drake and Parkview in the city's southwest side.

Neighbors include in the voting process would be Oakland Drive, Oakwood and Parkview Hills, the association says.

The association's resolutions were turned over to the city attorney's office and the Economic Development Task Force for review. City Commissioner Curtis Hanz, chairman of the task force, said task force members are recommending that the commission vote against the resolutions.

Hanz said the resolutions could inhibit the community input process.

In a letter to commissioners, Economic Development Corporation secretary James Westin said the EDC board also does not support the idea of a referendum on the guidelines.

"The board voted to endorse the planning process that has been initiated by WMU, one that includes neighborhood and community participation, and to refer the performance standards and restrictions recommended by ALPA to city planning staff for consideration in the development of a new zoning classification," Westin's letter said.

"Furthermore, the board does not support the idea of a neighborhood referendum as it would send a strong negative signal about the city's business climate and place the city at a severe disadvantage in attracting economic growth.

The areas under consideration for development include the 54-acre Colby Farm Orchard, west of Drake Road, and the 55-acre Lee Baker Farm, south of Parkview Avenue. The land is across the street from the Asylum Lake area.

"We have encouraged those who support the park because we think there may be opponents of the park coming to the meeting," Burke said.

In his letter, Burke said he thinks the referendum is not a well-conceived idea. He also said he does not think anyone should be able to veto a project that has such "major implications for the future of the entire county.

"...a referendum, whether Commission-ordered or otherwise, would send a strong negative signal about the business climate in the city of Kalamazoo and place it at a severe disadvantage in attracting economic growth."

A master plan for the park is expected to be presented to WMU's Board of Trustees this summer or early fall.

The City Commission will meet tonight at 7 p.m. in City Hall.