

## City, RLD continue back and forth on drainage options for development

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

---

Developing south Holyoke is not a new idea. Companies have expressed interest in relocating to the area in the past, and the city's master plan actually dictates that natural growth move in that direction.

Progress has been slow, however.

The most recent plans proposed by Robin Lake Development for commercial and residential lots south and east of Cobblestone Inn & Suites in Holyoke have been delayed as it was deemed necessary to conduct studies to determine if the current O'Neal pit used to handle drainage for southwest Holyoke could take on the extra water. The pit sits east of the hotel on Rupert O'Neal's land.

With the study detailing that the pit can only currently handle 50 percent of a 100-year event, T.C. Engineering Inc. out of North Platte, Neb., was hired to offer insight into available drainage possibilities. RLD also paid for and conducted its own drainage study that would allow all drainage from the developed area to be stored in a 4.5-acre lake. The lake is capable of handling four times the amount of water of a 500-year event. The proposal includes surrounding the pond with residential lots.

Although more water would not be entering the pit from the developed area as the lake will be used, RLD aims to use the pit's current location to develop multiple residential lots.

Four options were returned to the city by T.C. Engineering Inc. to deal with the pit's low capability. Option one eliminates the existing stormwater pit and utilizes pumping only; option two reduces the existing stormwater pit size and utilizes pumping; option three involves cleaning the pit, utilizing existing pumping and extending the discharge point; and option four is to enlarge the existing stormwater pit and utilize pumping.

Options one and two were initially part of RLD's proposal made by attorney Russell Sprague—who represents O'Neal and RLD—at the Feb. 25 city council meeting, as RLD wanted to minimize the pit to develop residential lots.

## City, RLD continue back and forth on drainage options for development

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

---

According to T.C. Engineering Inc., option one requires the least amount of land but is expensive, dependent on mechanical equipment that can fail and cannot handle a larger-than-design storm event. Option two boasts a smaller piece of land than what is currently used. The pond reduces some risk associated with mechanical failure but is still expensive and includes ongoing operation and maintenance costs.

After briefly reviewing the options, Holyoke City Superintendent Mark Brown commented that options three and four are more ideal for the city as there is less risk involved.

“The perfect scenario is if the water can run to a pond with no mechanical means needed,” Brown explained. “If you’re constantly relying on that pump, I’m sorry, but everything mechanical has a tendency to fail sooner or later. So when does it fail? Probably in the worst-case scenario possible.”

The pump would start up in option three if a 50-year event were happening, option two would require the pump to start for 10-25-year events, and the pump would start for every rainfall during option one. Brown stated that the more the pump has to be used, the greater the chance for failure.

T.C. Engineering Inc. noted that option three is the least expensive route and requires less ongoing operation and maintenance expenses but would require more land than options one and two.

Option four does not require piping work—although it is recommended—isn’t as expensive as options one and two, has the least amount of ongoing operation and maintenance expenses and is the most flexible in pump-down operations. Option four does require the most land, however.

Option one has an estimated price tag of \$408,000-\$590,000; option two, \$417,000-\$599,000; option three, roughly \$232,000; and option four, \$297,000.

## City, RLD continue back and forth on drainage options for development

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

---

As part of the report, T.C. Engineering Inc. identified option four as the preferred choice as it has a relatively low capital cost compared to other options. It has the lowest operation and maintenance costs and offers the lowest risk to the city. A hybrid option was also suggested that includes having overflow from the pit to RLD's internal stormwater system in the lake.

"In our opinion, it would be worth further discussions with RLD about the possibility of a pond overflow in conjunction with RLD's master development plan," the study reads. "If this possibility was exercised, the risk for the City of Holyoke could be minimized as much as possible."

Some compromise by both parties may be necessary as each side looks for options that best suit the issues at hand.

"I think the preferred option is to develop that area, but throughout this whole ordeal, RLD has tried to be cooperative with the city," said Sprague.

"If the city comes back and says a combination of some of these is the best way to go, I think RLD is open to considering all of the options at this point. Clearly the preferred way is to develop that area and go forward," said Sprague.

□

### Development is years in the making

Brown noted that the need for drainage data became more of an issue after Cobblestone Inn & Suites was constructed. With runoff from the hotel also running into the pit, the limitations of the pit became a concern.

O'Neal, owner of the land where development would take place east and south of the hotel, has had contact with the city about possibly developing the area for a number of years.

## City, RLD continue back and forth on drainage options for development

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

---

O'Neal said option three is nearly identical to a proposal he made in January of 2013 when he brought the idea of developing four residential lots east of the hotel to the city. The lots were proposed to empty into the pit in a manner similar to how the hotel's runoff enters the pit.

O'Neal stated that his proposal in 2013 was shot down because a drainage study of the 40 acres of his property was necessary.

Frustration began to mount for O'Neal because it seemed ironic to him that RLD is the only entity to have to pay for a drainage study of the area. The hotel, on the other hand, was allowed to quickly establish grading and drainage plans with little resistance, according to O'Neal. He also noted that the level the water would rise in the pit from the four residential lots was minimal compared to the amount the water rose from the hotel.

RLD's study could not be completed by T.C. Engineering Inc. until the city provided the engineering company with data regarding the water that was piped through O'Neal's property.

The city then had to pay for the study that provided the details of the drainage for southwest Holyoke. With the results indicating that no more water should be draining into the pit, RLD chose to utilize a 4.5-acre lake to handle all drainage for the area to be developed.

One important issue with the pit on O'Neal's land is that while the city has been using it for years, no official records or paperwork are available that represent an agreement between the two parties.

O'Neal stated that he also feels that the methods the city used to stop flooding west of the highway made his property more vulnerable to flooding. He speculated that the move was due to possible lawsuits the city could face if west of the highway flooded while the city was aware that the pit was unable to fully handle a major event.

O'Neal mentioned that he is not the only landowner in the drainage region. The hotel also

## City, RLD continue back and forth on drainage options for development

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

---

possesses land, and there are also open areas west of the highway that could be used.

With the rainy season approaching, RLD has made it known that they feel a sense of urgency is necessary to get moving on the project.

RLD has stated throughout the process that the development offers many benefits to the city. It will create a unique variety of commercial and residential properties and a place for new business. Also, it is visually attractive, provides a property tax base and possibly sales tax revenue.

Commercial property would be along the highway, while the residential property would be east of the highway. The residential area is slated to be a covenant-controlled community to help retain the value of the area.

O'Neal has also been in contact with Phillips County Economic Development as the area could address some issues brought to light from a current survey that identified housing needs in the county, including an area for senior housing.

The two sides will meet again at the Tuesday, April 1 city council meeting.

"We have done a lot of studies, and we have the data we need to resolve the problem. Now it comes down to how are we moving forward?" Sprague asked.

"From RLD's perspective, we have done everything the city has asked us to do. We've gathered the data, we have come up with a solution. If the city doesn't want a solution that RLD has given, we need some feedback now.

"We have tried to go as far as we can go and move the ball as far as we can, and now we need the city's feedback. RLD is ready to find a solution and move cooperatively forward with all parties involved."

## City, RLD continue back and forth on drainage options for development

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

---

Holyoke Enterprise March 27, 2014