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Motorsports club gets green light

Mayor Cox: 'Park is hereby approved'



The Dawsonville City Council chamber was overflowing with citizens waiting for the vote on the Atlanta Motorsports Park. The park was approved unanimously by the council.

The Dawsonville City Council waved the green flag Monday night when they unanimously approved a high-end motorsports park set for northwestern Dawson County.

The council approved a rezoning that will transfer about 152 acres from residential to restricted industrial between Duck Thurmond Road and Hwy. 183.

Developer Jeremy Porter said that after working on the project for over two years, he plans to be a good neighbor to the community.

However, not everyone agrees.

Kirk Brookshire, who lives within three miles of the site and has been vocal about his opposition, said: "There's a lot of people that have just spent their last dollar in the city of Dawsonville. They (city council) don't have any respect for us and we are surely not going to support this city."

James Thurmond, whose family roots date back several generations, said: "I think they (council) owe us all an apology. It is a shame."

City Councilman Jonathan Cox thinks otherwise.

"I read the information, thought about it, prayed about it and wrestled with it. I just felt like it was the right thing to do. Based on the stipulations put forth, I believe it will be a success," he said after the vote.

The council imposed nearly two dozen stipulations, ranging from limited hours of operation, when the project must begin and be completed, sound monitoring, number of cars on the track and road improvements at Porter's expense.

Porter said he plans to go above and beyond as he moves forward with his project.

"This really is a win for everyone concerned. New jobs, economic development even in a bad economy, family entertainment are all part of the positive outcome with the approval of the zoning change to allow us to begin building Atlanta Motorsports Park," Porter said.

"I plan to be a good neighbor. We plan to do everything we can to make this good for the community," he added.

Local racing enthusiast Gordon Pirkle was excited about the council's decision.

"I've always thought this was positive. I cannot understand the objections. We are in a depression now. We need more jobs and a better tax base," Pirkle said.

Preliminary estimates by the Development Authority of Dawson County have indicated the project could bring in as much as \$4 million in tax revenue over the next decade.

According to Porter, the development would also bring dozens of new jobs to the county.

Mayor Joe Lane Cox thinks the city council did the right thing.

"I think the council did a great thing and I think it is going to be good for the city in the long run," he said.

However, the battle may not be over just yet.

An attorney representing West Hamryka, who lives and operates a horse farm adjacent to the property, presented the city with an updated letter notifying of pending litigation shortly before the meeting, according to City Attorney Dana Miles.

"We are prepared to take this to the next legal level, due to the city's improper spot zoning. The city council and mayor have thrown out the land use plan that they worked on for years," said Hamryka after the vote.

"We are doing this (fighting against the park) to save our community. This legal battle could go on for a long time. We expect it to be lengthy and costly," he added.

Porter said, let the opponents spend \$100,000 fighting a losing battle.

"I'd rather just work with them now, because we are going to continue to develop the park and move forward," Porter said.