

Elgin TOD moves one step closer to realization

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Elgin's economic development corporation has gotten the go-ahead to buy 80 acres earmarked for a transit-oriented development, land that will be linked to an additional 920 acres in the city that Gateway Planning Group plans to turn into a dense, mixed-use area.

The city will pay \$640,000 for the land, says Elgin City Manager Jeff Coffee. Scott Polikov, president of Gateway, says Elgin's decision to buy the land means his company will move forward with a detailed development plan for the 1,000 acres that will incorporate residential, retail and commercial buildings in a dense mixed-use setting and use some sort of value-capture management, such as a tax increment finance zone.

Polikov says that while the entire 1,000 acres Gateway is planning in Elgin won't technically be a TOD, the dense development will bring the city higher revenue than traditional low-density development -- revenue that can be used toward being a part of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority's service area.

"This is the beginning of a model for communities that are at their sales tax cap to figure out a way to participate in a regional rail system even though they're not in the service area," Polikov says. "I think you'll see the development of some sort of interlocal agreement [with Cap Metro]."

Cap Metro's current plans call for commuter rail, starting service in the fall of 2008, to run along a 32-mile track from Leander to downtown Austin. Elgin and Manor city officials have been talking to Cap Metro about a possible extension of the rail to the cities east of Austin.

But while Manor is in Cap Metro's service area, Elgin is not. Like many Central Texas cities, Elgin doesn't have the available penny of sales tax needed to join the agency.

Cap Metro Chairman Lee Walker says there are still hurdles ahead of Elgin in its quest to join the agency's service area, such as an election and capital costs, but this latest move puts Elgin one step closer.

"I applaud them," Walker says. "You see so many communities that are behind the curve, and [Elgin] appears to be doing their best to be ahead ... it moves now from a discussion to heavy-duty discussion, maybe even negotiation."