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Boulder's leaders listen to pleas

City will study rezoning mobile home park

By Heath Urie
Camera Staff Writer

More than 100 residents of the Orchard Grove mobile home park in north Boulder made impassioned pleas to the City Council on Tuesday night to help protect their communi-

ty from redevelopment.

The leaders listened — and agreed to direct city staffers to study a possible ordinance to rezone the 32-acre site so that only a mobile home park, not additional residential or commercial development, would be allowed.

Developer Jim Chanin, who has a contract to buy the park, said he would have to “reassess” his plans to put in a “medium-density residential and mixed-use community” if the

city decides to go through with the changes.

“Fear of the unknown is a very compelling human emotion,” Chanin said.

The council’s decision came after a flood of Orchard Grove residents packed the council chambers.

With white sheets of paper that read “Orchard Grove” pinned to their shirts, one by one residents told the City Council about the investments they stand to lose if a deal goes

through to sell the property.

“We’re hovering between panic and fear,” said Rita Bowman, who has lived at the park for 14 years. “My life savings are in my trailer.”

Bowman’s comments echoed those of her neighbors, who are organizing among themselves community meetings and circulating e-mail lists to keep up on the issue.

Ginger Zukowski, a 34-year resident, said any plans to buy the land and redevelop it

would effectively evict about 400 Orchard Grove residents from Boulder because most trailers can’t be moved to other places in the county.

“What do we want Boulder to be?” she said. “Do we want it to be rich people?”

Councilman Macon Cowles said after hearing the comments that the council must act to protect the city’s limited affordable housing.

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Boulder studies trailer park rezoning

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“We rezoned every mobile home park in the city except this one,” Cowles said. “I think it’s the time to reconsider.”

Councilwoman Lisa Morzel went a step further, saying she thinks the city should buy the land and manage it to help stabilize rent rates and other uncertainties residents face.

“It’s probably the best value of affordable housing we can get in the city,” Morzel said.

Councilman Matt Appelbaum said he, too, wants a quick options study completed, but he cautioned that the city could end up creating a bigger problem than it might solve by rezoning or taking control of Orchard Grove.

“I don’t see any point in making a change that has a longevity of two years,” he said, noting the potential infrastructure problems the aging community has.

The developer explained to

a frantic group of residents during the meeting how he’d keep a section of affordable housing on the lot.

“It isn’t functioning as a subdivision right now,” Chanin said. “We want to redevelop something that makes sense for the city and the community.”

Chanin said he’s more than willing to sit down with residents to discuss their concerns, and he promised he’d work to create enough affordable housing on the site for all the existing trailer owners.

“I am all about affordable housing,” Chanin said. “I will be able to make a lot of people happy.”

Under the council’s direction Tuesday night, city staffers will work to bring back several options for the council to consider sometime next month. Chanin declined to say how close he is to closing on the site, except that it’s more than a month away.