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Preparing for CSU growth

Developer proposes 700-bed off-campus complex

by Trevor Hughes

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A national development company is proposing a large off-campus student apartment complex next to the CSU campus — on the site where four people died in the 1997 Spring Creek flood.

Alabama-based Capstone Cos. has been working with city planners for about a year to develop a plan for the “Choice Center” site near the southwest corner of Prospect Street and College Avenue, along Mason Street.

The project envisions retail development, along with apartments for up to 700 students, according to planning documents on file with the city.

City leaders are welcoming the project as a key component of their vision of the Mason Street mixed-use corridor.

“It’s over 6 acres of land immediately adjacent to CSU and the Mason Street corridor,” said Anne Aspen, a city planner who has been working with Capstone. “It’s an excellent place to locate student housing.”

CSU has aggressive plans to add 6,000 additional students, increasing undergraduate enrollment to 25,000.

CSU housing officials are finalizing a 10-year housing master plan and so far have declined to discuss it publicly because it has not yet been formally approved by the university’s Board of Governors. That approval is expected later this summer.

Joe Rowan, executive director of Funding Partners for Housing Solutions, a nonprofit housing advocacy group in Fort Collins, said CSU needs private developers such as Capstone to help fill the need because the university can’t — and shouldn’t — build dorms for all those new students.

A CSU housing spokeswoman on Wednesday said the university is considering public/private partnerships but again declined to discuss the 10-year master plan, which has been presented to members of the campus community, but not the public.

“There aren’t a lot of alternatives that are keeping up with the steady growth of the campus,” Rowan said. “Public entities cannot build as efficiently as private developers can.”

The company wants to have the project open in August 2009, about the same time CSU plans to open a 219-bed dorm at the Academic Village on campus.

Rowan said he thinks the Capstone project will be successful on several levels, bringing a new look to the intersection while helping keep additional students from flooding into traditional

single-family neighborhoods.

Student housing in Fort Collins costs about \$300 a month, Rowan said, and the Capstone project is aiming to price rents a little higher. He declined to discuss the specifics.

"It's a little higher than what you would typically think of for student housing," Rowan said.

CSU officials say students continue to demand more amenities from their housing and also seem willing to pay for it.

Students these days often want single rooms, and they definitely don't like sharing bathrooms, said James Dolak, CSU's executive director of housing and dining services.

"It's not only aesthetics, but the students' requests for amenities. Lots of pressures come into play," he said. "Students are looking for more privacy."

Capstone envisions apartment buildings four stories high, with apartments housing as many as four students in each unit.

Because the project is being developed specifically as student housing, it would likely be exempt from the city's three-unrelated law intended in part to keep students from packing into single-family homes.

Because the Capstone project is being built on the site where four people died in the Spring Creek flood, the development company is taking extra precautions to reduce flood risks, Aspen said, and may also install some sort of memorial to the victims.

Capstone referred calls about the project to the company's spokesman, who was out of the office Wednesday. He did not return phone messages left at his office or on his mobile phone.
