

# Frequently Asked Questions: University of Nevada, Reno South McCarran Parcel Rezone

1/25/12

## **Background**

The University of Nevada, Reno has requested rezoning of a 104-acre parcel which is part of the University's 1,049-acre Main Station Field Laboratory. The intent is to preserve the value of the parcel, which borders South McCarran Boulevard and was annexed into the City of Reno in October 2011. The remainder of the Main Station Field Lab is outside the city and in Washoe County jurisdiction. The University's request to rezone the parcel to a Planned Unit Development is compatible with planning codes and the regional Master Plan requirements, and was approved by the City of Reno Planning Commission in November 2011. At the University's request and with the support of those expressing concerns, the Reno City Council rescheduled the item to March 2012 to allow time for further discussion of issues surrounding the rezoning.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. Why is the University interested in protecting development rights on this site?**

The University must work toward the most efficient and effective use of all its assets. At this time and in this economic environment, the University must be a good steward of its real estate holdings so that when the real estate market rebounds, the University will be prepared to move forward, if necessary. This requires advanced planning and protection of assets, and perhaps at no other point in the University's history has this kind of planning been more imperative.

### **2. Is the University currently talking to developers to sell this property today?**

No. The University does not have immediate plans to sell or develop this property; the University simply wants to plan, entitle and protect it. Any sale of any property would require Board of Regents approval, a very public process.

### **3. Why is the University making the request at this time?**

With the downturn in the economy, this is an ideal time to plan and obtain entitlements for the future to ensure economic development opportunities are available at the appropriate time. While the urgency for rezoning is now, the timeframe for possible development could be seven to 20 years.

Additionally, the director of the Flood Management Project recently predicted finishing the environmental impact statement for the Truckee Meadows Flood Project in 2012 and going to Congress to fund the project in 2013. The University would receive little in the way of protection for this parcel from the latest flood plan. The Flood Project models currently show continued flooding of the Main Station Field Lab property, exclusive of this parcel, to at least 91 percent of the level it has flooded in the past – if the locally preferred flood project is built. The University was told in January 2011 that the only way for the flood project to officially consider the South McCarran parcel as protected for development is to get the parcel formally entitled by a local government. Under these circumstances it is quite reasonable to retain some development rights as represented by the 104-acre South McCarran Parcel, which is not in the floodway designation.

### **4. What is the current zoning and what is the proposed zoning?**

The University's 104-acre South McCarran parcel that was annexed into the City of Reno is currently zoned LLR1 – large-lot residential, which permits construction of one residence per acre. The request is for a rezone to a Planned Unit Development (PUD) that would accommodate employment generating research and development, as well as light industrial/commercial uses.

**5. What will rezoning accomplish?**

Rezoning will protect the value of the parcel land and preserve an option that would – if acted upon – financially support the educational mission of the University. The ultimate beneficiaries would be the University's students.

**6. Will rezoning impede research and education related to agriculture?**

No. The Main Station Field Lab will continue to serve the needs of agriculture students, researchers and faculty across a number of disciplines. There is ample space to support agricultural education and research that enhances the industry and economy of Nevada. The field lab will continue to provide educational opportunities to the community and service organizations. The University's agricultural research and education program has several parcels of land available, such as the 50-acre parcel between Valley Road and Wells Avenue (north of I-80), and the 10,600-acre Gund Ranch Research and Training Facility, representative of Nevada's rangelands, 45 miles northeast of Austin in Eureka County.

**7. Is this a compatible use for the surrounding area?**

This rezoning request meets planning codes and Master Plan requirements and is compatible with surrounding uses. The University is requesting a PUD which is an appropriate use in a Special Planning Area designation and does not require a Master Plan amendment. The Main Station Field Lab is within an urban development area as designated by the regional plan.

**8. Is this action counter to the University's status as a Land Grant university?**

The historic mission of land-grant universities is to provide access to education to the working class, including education in engineering, agriculture and teacher preparation. The University of Nevada, Reno fulfills this mission, and the proposed rezoning of the 104-acre parcel does not impede the University's ability to continue to fulfill this mission. The mission of land-grant universities to serve the needs of their states continues to evolve over time. Energy alternatives, sustainability, increased degree attainment and alternate delivery models for public instruction are part of the new dialogue of today's land-grant universities.

**9. If the PUD request is approved, what are the plans for the Main Station Field Lab?**

The Main Station Field Lab will continue to serve the agriculture-related needs of students, researchers and faculty across a number of disciplines. Appropriate curriculum will utilize the Main Station Field Lab in conjunction with the other University facilities that serve agricultural education, such as the Agricultural Experiment Station on Valley Road and the Gund Ranch Research and Training Facility in Eureka County.

**10. What is the future of agriculture at the University?**

Due to significant budget reductions throughout the University and low student enrollment in the traditional parts of the College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources (CABNR), the University closed the animal science department and the resource economics department. The University will not return to intensive livestock production nor maintain a livestock operation that would require the entire Main Station Field Lab acreage.

However, the University's continued commitment to agriculture is evidenced through new agriculture-related degrees launched by CABNR this year. Among the degrees offered through the college's new Department of Agriculture, Nutrition and Veterinary Sciences are agricultural sciences, rangeland ecology and management, and veterinary sciences. Large-scale range science is conducted at the University's Gund Ranch Research and Training Facility in Eureka County.

At the Agricultural Experiment Station on Valley Road, the University has invested in research greenhouses where research and demonstrations are being conducted on low-water fruit, vegetable and other crops. Other projects include a number of renewable energy projects focused on production of commercially viable biofuels. Even with increased investment, research and demonstrations, the Valley Road property does not yet operate at capacity.

The University also has a new proposal for High Desert Initiatives, a joint venture between the College of Business, CABNR and local co-ops and farmers, and has invested in other programs, including hydroponic and aero-ponic commercial greenhouse productions with New Gardens and Nevada Naturals.

Over the years, student enrollment in traditional agriculture classes has declined, nevertheless, the University remains committed to agricultural education, continues to recruit new students and is carrying forward with these workforce relevant degrees. The dean of CABNR works closely with the agriculture community in developing appropriate curriculum that supports their industry in Nevada, and the University is entering discussions with local food advocates to explore curriculum options surrounding locally grown foods, sustainability and entrepreneurialism.

**11. Will this action be detrimental to the Truckee Meadows Flood Management Project?**

The requested rezoning will not affect the regional Flood Management Project except to require protection of the South McCarran parcel from future flooding. This action does not compromise future community flood protection. The University has served as a member of the Flood Project Coordinating Committee and working group since their inception in 2005. For more than six years the University has been in discussions with the City of Reno, City of Sparks and Washoe County about the role the Main Station Field Lab land might play in community flood plans. Throughout these years of discussion, the University has repeatedly stated its intent to entitle these 104 acres for future development. This is well documented in numerous reports, maps and other communications.

**12. Will rezoning just drive up the cost the city or flood management would have to pay for the land for the flood project?**

We never have envisioned either the city or flood project purchasing the South McCarran parcel. This parcel has not been shown as part of the flood project and is not essential to development of the flood project.

**13. Will development on this parcel increase flooding to other areas?**

The South McCarran parcel must meet all City of Reno one-to-one flood mitigation requirements, and will therefore not increase the flood levels of this area. The University is meeting all codes including the recently revised city code approved by the Planning Commission and City Council in 2010. In fact, at the Planning Commission meeting in October the University agreed to modify the plan in order to require protection of future structures on this property to the 117-year flood elevation level. Sufficient high-land areas will be retained to accommodate livestock in the event of a flood on the Main Station Field Lab.

**14. Will Wolf Pack Meats have to close if this parcel is developed?**

Rezoning will not affect Wolf Pack Meats. It is near, but not within, the 104-acre parcel. The University offered to the Planning Commission to incorporate a 30-foot buffer on the north end of the PUD, and this was accepted and noted in their approval. The total buffered space from Wolf Pack Meats will include this 30-foot PUD buffer, plus Clean Water Way and additional space from Clean Water Way to the facility.

Wolf Pack Meats operates today in proximity to businesses, and the University has not had one complaint about noise or odors. Should development of the PUD move forward, the proximity to Wolf Pack Meats, which is open and obvious, would be fully disclosed to a developer, owner or tenant. Wolf Pack Meats remains on land currently located in Washoe County, and is an existing use which would be allowed to continue.

**15. Is Wolf Pack Meats proposed for closure?**

Although the University cannot continue to absorb the financial subsidy to Wolf Pack Meats, the University has never proposed to close it. The University is presently looking for a business model that stops the deficits and addresses the concerns of private meat processing businesses that Wolf Pack Meats currently presents unfair, state-subsidized competition.

The University is meeting with stakeholders, including representatives of private meat processing businesses, current customers of Wolf Pack Meats, local co-ops and the local food movement. With their input, the University is developing a Request for Proposal to support an open process by which to determine whether there is interest on the part of someone or some group to maintain the operation of Wolf Pack Meats on a profitable basis.

Agricultural teaching and research is no longer conducted at Wolf Pack Meats. However, teaching and research related to agriculture does continue through the University.

**16. A nearby development project was turned down by the City. Why should the University's rezoning proposal be approved if the other was rejected?**

The City of Reno Master Plan currently designates 3.79 acres of the Manke land as Unincorporated Transition (UT) and 10.23 acres as Parks/Recreation and Open Space. The proposed Manke development, south of the University's South McCarran parcel, required a Master Plan amendment for a non-conforming use. Their Master Plan amendment was rejected.

The University is requesting a PUD which meets the City of Reno Master Plan as a Special Planning Area. Because it is an appropriate use within the Master Plan, an amendment is not required for the University's South McCarran parcel as it was for the Manke parcel.

**17. Didn't planners intend the Main Station Field Lab to remain open space?**

No. The Main Station Field Lab is not designated as Open Space. In particular, the South McCarran parcel is also not designated by the City as open space. The Main Station Field Lab and South McCarran parcel are located in the Reno Truckee Meadows Service Area and Sphere of Influence. According to Regional Plan policies, these are areas where services are to be provided, annexation is planned and development is encouraged. There is, however, no plan to rezone other portions of the Main Station Field Lab.