

ORLANDO COUNCIL OKS GROWTH PLAN ORANGE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS GET TO DISCUSS AND VOTE ON THE COMPLICATED AGREEMENT TODAY.

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A historic agreement that could allow the city of Orlando to more than double in size over the next 12 to 24 years cleared its first hurdle Monday afternoon at City Hall.

Despite the reservations of a few members, the Orlando City Council approved the complicated city-Orange County plan, 7-0.

Orange County commissioners are expected to discuss and approve the package of utility and planning agreements starting at 10:30 a.m. today.

Orlando Mayor Glenda Hood praised the council for supporting the deal, which will map out how the city and county grow and provide water, sewer and other services to thousands of current and new residents.

"We should all be happy with what we have here," Hood said. "It's not perfect, but it has given us the ability to negotiate things that have been on the table a long time."

At the core of the agreement is a map that defines exactly where the city could grow by annexing rural county areas and existing communities. The plan also outlines where each government will provide utilities and requires the city to provide services to several low-income county communities in dire need of sewers.

Under the plan, the city could, in theory, grow from 55,537 acres to more than 124,100. As the first step in the expansion, the county would no longer oppose Orlando's annexation of the Lake Nona subdivision and approximately 7,500 nearby acres in southeast Orange.

Other areas the city hopes to annex include land south and east of Orlando International Airport, most of it inside the Orlando beltway.

The city will also try to take claim to several older neighborhoods such as Holden Heights, Lockhart/Fairvilla, Lake Margaret/Conway and Mercy Drive.

Those areas are in Orange County but are surrounded by city land, making it difficult for the county to provide police and water service.

The city won't be able to take those communities without a radical overhaul of state annexation laws by the Legislature. Under current law, a majority of residents must vote to change. The city and county are hoping to push the annexations through without a vote of residents.

City Development Director Rick Bernhardt said the growth agreement will save taxpayers money by clearly defining boundaries and reducing duplication of services. Bernhardt said it will also prevent developers from playing the city

against the county for the best utility rates and tax breaks.

But one developer is opposing the plan.

Maury L. Carter, who owns 2,000 acres near Lake Nona, wants to be in the city because it can provide water and sewer services to the area faster than the county.

But the county, which has already approved Carter's nearby Lake Hart development, wants to keep all his property.

Carter has filed a lawsuit seeking to block the Lake Nona annexations and his attorney, Duke Woodson, said they will sue to block the city-county pact.

Carter is angry because he says the agreement forces him to stay in the county and thus is "taking" his property rights in violation of the Florida Constitution.

After hearing those complaints, City Council member Jeff Clark questioned whether current City Council members can legally restrict the ability of future councils to annex land.

But in the end, Clark and Council member Don Ammerman, who also expressed sympathy for Carter's problem, voted to support the city-county deal.

[Illustration]

MAP: Orlando/Orange County map SENTINEL GRAPHIC

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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