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Public weighs in on The Reserve

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Mansfield residents not only got a glimpse of what The Reserve at Mansfield could look like, they got to have a hand in influencing the design guidelines.

Officials from RTKL Associates displayed examples of landscaping, architecture, building setbacks and parking arrangements, allowing the public to vote on them via electronic voting devices.

The joint meeting was attended by members of the City Council, the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Mansfield Economic Development Corp Board, the Mansfield Park Facilities Development Corp. and about 50 residents.

The data will be used as the city drafts ordinances for the 2,600-acre area, located west of Texas 360, east of U.S. 287 and south of East Broad Street, formerly known as the Golden Triangle. The proposed ordinances will be presented at a special meeting Nov. 9.

The city expects to have the ordinances adopted before a building moratorium expires Jan. 11. The moratorium, which has been in place since July 2003, to prohibit zoning changes or building permits while the city consulted with RTKL and Leland Consulting Group for marketing and design strategies for the area.

Councilman Dick Littell said the idea of creating a Crossing, South Pointe and other uses is a rare opportunity for a city.

"We've got a blank slate so we can be anything we want," Littell said.

Grist Mill Crossing is the 80-acre mixed-use retail project at the intersection of U.S. 287 and East Broad Street. South Pointe, which received planned development-zoning approval earlier this year, is a master-planned community designed for people to live, work and play within the project, located at the southern tip. The Methodist Mansfield Medical Center, already under construction at the intersection of East Broad Street and Matlock Road, will be an anchor for other medical offices and auxiliary uses.

By planning ahead and creating strict design for retail businesses, Mansfield could avoid some of the deterioration other cities have experienced when retailers such as Wal-Mart abandon their big-box stores, Littell said.

Councilman Michael McSpadden envisions heavily landscaped thoroughfares with large trees along the roads and in the median.

Instead of concrete sidewalks, he favors brick or cobblestone walkways that would have a greater aesthetic look, he said.

With so much input, he said it will be interesting to see what the majority of people want.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," McSpadden said. Commissioner Dick Wentzel said he liked the parking garage designs, which blend in with the surrounding buildings.

"They showed parking garages that didn't look like parking garages," Wentzel said.

Ralph Turpin, Planning and Zoning Commission chairman, liked the expansive green spaces and screened parking lots.

"That was what was most desirable to me," Turpin said.

The city is examining ways to pay for infrastructure such as roads, sewer, water and electricity, whether through tax increment financing or a bond election.

The plan calls for Matlock Road, Heritage Parkway and Lone Star Parkway to become major thoroughfares.