

Jax seeks utility upgrades

Outdoors retailer planning expansion of N. College store

by pat ferrier • PatFerrier@coloradoan.com • April 20, 2010

Jax Mercantile, a longtime presence on North College Avenue, plans to expand its outdoor store at 1200 N. College Ave. and is asking the city for a hand.

Tonight, Jax owner Jim Quinlan plans to ask the City Council, which acts as the city's Urban Renewal Authority board, for up to \$150,000 in tax increment financing to help with utilities and street improvements in front of and behind the store.

Tax increment financing is a development tool used to help fund infrastructure improvements. The tax increment is the difference between the property taxes paid on a building now and what it is likely to pay after the improvements are made.

The Larimer County Assessor's office estimates Jax's expansion will generate an additional \$656,000 in taxes over the next 19 years.

The North College Citizens Advisory Group, which advises the URA board on plans within the North College corridor, generally considers loaning up to 50 percent of tax increment, said Ron Lautzenheiser, a member of the advisory group. That means Quinlan could have requested about \$325,000.

"Instead of sucking CAG for every dime he could get, Jim left a lot of money on the table," Lautzenheiser said.

"We're so excited about this I can't begin to tell you. It's the only regional draw; King Soopers will be the second draw. It will generate substantial sales tax for the city; it's good for the city and good for the north side."

Expansion of the North College store has been on Quinlan's wish list for a couple years. "We may now have overcome all the hurdles basically in getting a plan approved," Quinlan said. "It was a very challenging exercise."

Up until 2008, expansion was out of the question because some of Quinlan's property was in the Dry Creek floodway and building was prohibited.

That changed when the city invested \$10 million to reduce the size of the floodplain from 1,400 acres to 300 acres.

Jax's expansion requires Quinlan to kick in about \$40,000 for improvements to College Avenue and about \$100,000 to future improvements on Jerome Street, which currently has no water, sewer or stormwater drainage.

Those services will not be added to Jerome Street until land to the east is developed, Quinlan said. "We're setting aside money for when the time comes."

The expansion will increase Jax's retail space by 25 percent, including conversion of a 9,000-square-foot warehouse into additional retail space and add 10 new jobs. Quinlan plans to add an indoor archery range and bow shop and a pond and courtyard to serve as a demonstration area for boats and fly-casting.

"We've needed more space for a long time. I'm very anxious to have more space to expand a lot of categories that we already have and hopefully adding a couple categories," Quinlan said. "We will have more room for clothing, camping, fishing, hunting and we're also considering adding some athletics that

we're doing in Loveland and not in Fort Collins.”

Within the last few years, Quinlan has expanded its farm and ranch store in Fort Collins and opened a Loveland store.

He is “looking at other opportunities,” for expansion but said he was committed to Fort Collins. “We’ve been there for 55 years and we’re very anxious to expand our selection and make it an even better destination than it is already.”

The city’s planning staff and North College Citizen’s Advisory Group has recommended approval.

The expansion

“will help the overall aesthetics and business potential for the whole area,” said Bob Brown, a member of the Citizens Advisory Group.

Citing Jax’s efforts toward environmental sustainability, Fort Collins’ urban renewal planner Christina Vincent wrote in a summary for the URA board that Jax reuses surplus store fixtures, used furniture and equipment and has an active recycling program. It also pays its employees \$1 per day to ride their bikes to work resulting in 19,835 bike miles last year.

“This has a direct and indirect positive effect on the local economy, positive influence on the health of Jax employees and contributes to decreasing the vehicular trips on roads.”

Interested?

The City Council meeting begins at 6 p.m. in City Hall, 300 LaPorte Ave., Fort Collins. It is also broadcast live on Cable Channel 14.