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Green space battle waged in cyberspace

By Bonnie Burch, staff writer

BRENTWOOD — The battle over trees, meadows and the residential character of Brentwood has gone high tech.

Several factions in two referendum issues on a Sept. 23 special election ballot have taken to cyberspace to post opinions, discuss statistics and showcase maps and photographs of the area in an effort to persuade a wide Brentwood audience to cast their ballots in their favor.

Web sites are up for an against the extension of Mallory Lane to Concord Road, and for a referendum calling for taxpayer funding for city purchases of significant green space.

"I think it's a great way to reach people and get a point made about a certain issue because you can get so much information on a Web site," said Don Fischer, who helps with www.savebrentwood.com, a Web site opposed to the Mallory Lane extension. "Especially with an issue like this, you can't get all the information on a one-page flier or on a bumper sticker. It's kind of a one-stop shop to get fully educated."

On the Web, visitors can find a questions and answers area, surf quotes from city commissioners and view photographs of the land as it exists now and what it may look like in the future. And voters can find this information at their fingertips even if it's 2 in the morning.

The site details the concern that the roadway would bring additional traffic to residential neighborhoods and would bring a fifth stop light on the street between the Franklin Road intersection and Brenthaven subdivision. Opponents of the extension referendum also say the roadway would lower property values of those living nearby, bring crime and pollution to the area and will cut too close to homes.

Fischer said that no one group or organization is in charge of the site, but that submissions are posted by interested residents from all over Brentwood.

"It's kind of a work in progress. And I'm sure we'll be changing and adding items probably all the way through to Sept. 23," he said.

Southeast Venture, the potential developer of the property that would be served by the road, has just launched a Web site to present their side of the referendum issue.

"We believe that when you hear the facts of our story that it'll be self-evident why this road is in the best interest of the city. Much of the opposition's argument is based on misinformation. I think that this is one of the best ways to get the correct information out there," said Cam Sorenson, principal of Southeast Venture.

The Web site at www.mallorylaneinfo.com provides an FAQ section, quotes from neighbors who support the project, detailed plans, newspaper articles and an aerial map showing where the proposed road would fall on the Brentwood landscape.

The Web site notes that the proposed roadway through the so-called flagpole property would not go through any neighborhoods. An exit ramp off of I-65 and to the back of the now vacant Service

Merchandise headquarters would also alleviate traffic. The proposal would bring in revenue to the city and was recommended by the Brentwood 20/20 plan, a blueprint for future city growth, Sorenson said.

If residents vote yes, the developer plans for residential development near Concord Road and retail options on the southern end of the extension, called Mallory Park.

The referendum asks residents whether the city should take out \$4 million in general obligation bonds for the extension. Property taxes will not be increased for Brentwood residents because the debt is budgeted in the Capital Improvements Program. The developer has agreed to pay an additional \$6 million toward the roadway.

In addition to the Web site, Southeast Venture also plans to get the word out with advertising and direct mail.

Citizens for Brentwood Green Space are very familiar with the power of the Internet to effect change in the community. Between 150 and 200 signatures of the more than 1,600 autographs on a petition asking the City Commission to preserve open space were gleaned from a form posted on their Web site at www.brentwoodgreenspace.org.

Even though a majority of signatures were gathered from personal contact, the Internet helped support the volunteers who were circulating petitions, said Gil Hutchinson, who helps out on the organization's site.

"From our perspective it allowed us to leverage our resources. We're all moms and dads. We have jobs. We all have things like scouts and soccer we do in addition," he said.

The second referendum question — whether the city should take out \$15 million worth of bonds to buy open land and green space for parks and preservation — was a direct result of the group's petition.

Now the Internet site stumps for a "yes" vote on the proposal. The site introduces residents to the green space leaders, posts frequently asked questions and still asks for signatures for the online petition.

When creating the Web site, Hutchinson decided to appeal to two types of people. Those who are more analytical get a special facts and figures page, which defines the proposal in a numbers format. Those who make decisions emotionally will appreciate the multitude of pictures showing open space with Brentwood green grass, trees and bubbling creeks.

"Pictures are really worth a thousand words. Some people think that open space will be here forever," he said.

But at least one group — those opposed to the higher property tax a positive vote on the green space referendum would bring — aren't as keen on the Internet. So far, a Web site stating their position is not in the works. Instead, volunteers will be holding informational meetings and knocking on doors to speak to residents one on one.

"We're just doing it the old fashioned way," said Bill Aiken, who heads the group opposed to the green space question.

Read about referendum positions

The City of Brentwood Web site (click on Bond Referendums Information on homepage): www.brentwood-tn.org

Mallory Lane extension referendum

Pro: www.mallorylaneinfo.com

Con: www.savebrentwood.com

Green space referendum

Pro: www.brentwoodgreenspace.org

Con: No Web site

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City's Web site offers neutral information on ballot questions

BRENTWOOD — With a special election to decide two issues up for a referendum vote weeks away, the City of Brentwood is also turning to the Internet to disseminate facts and figures about both issues as well as information about the election.

The city has hosted its own Web site, where Board agendas, events and contact numbers are posted, for the past several years at www.brentwood-tn.org.

So after months of questions posed by residents concerning the two referendums on the ballot, the city turned to the Internet to reach as many constituents as possible.

"It was just a quick way to put it out there. It's very immediate," City Manager Mike Walker said.

But don't expect the city to come down on either side of the issues. The Web site presents strictly upfront information only without bias to either party, he said.

The site contains separate questions and answers on the referendum to extend Mallory Lane up to Concord Road and another on whether the city should borrow \$50 million in bonds to preserve green space.

Exact wording of both referendums as well as how to read the referendums in layman's terms, provided by a recent *Tennessean* article, is posted on the city's Web page. A map of where the Mallory Lane extension would cut through the property is available.

Also on the site are voting times and places and a map listing the voting precincts.

Information on the Web site has been available for about a week.

For those who are not inclined to go onto a computer, the city will also be sending out the referendum information through regular snail mail in a monthly newsletter format going to every household in Brentwood.

"It'll be about three pages of information and will be similar to what's on the Web site with questions and answers, analysis and the ballot question," said Walker.

The mailing should go out by Labor Day.