

Embattled Afghan Taliban rely on human shields

Taliban fighters holding out in Marjah are increasingly using civilians as human shields, firing from compounds.

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Council to buy part of Riverwalk

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The on-again, off-again Riverwalk project is on again.

The Fort Collins City Council voted unanimously early Wednesday morning to buy 128 acres southwest of the interchange of Interstate 25 and Harmony Road to use as a reservoir and open space area. The property sits on the south side of the Riverwalk development proposed by developer Jay Stoner.

The decision clears the way for Stoner to sell the 293-acre

Riverwalk property to Turnkey Property Service, which in turn will sell the reservoir site to the city for \$4.425 million.

Council's decision came after midnight and after much complaining from members about the lack of public process in putting the deal together.

Because of time restraints, the proposal was not reviewed by citizen advisory boards that typically would be asked to weigh in on the matter, including the city's water board.

Mayor pro-tem Kelly Ohlson said the process showed disrespect for the water board and was "intentional, blatant and irresponsible at the staff level."

City Manager Darin Atteberry said there was no effort to exclude the water board, although he agreed the process was not "optimal." The stop-and-start nature of the project and deadline pressures facing the developer dictated how the deal was handled, he said.

In August, the council unanimously approved a \$5.8 million contract to buy the land from Stoner, but the deal fell through.

"I think that the nature of the project and constant change has put us in this predicament," he said.

The city has been dealing with the Riverwalk proposal in its various configurations for more than three years.

At one point, Timnath was prepared to annex west of I-25 in order to bring the project

under its control. That proposal set off a battle between Timnath and Fort Collins that was resolved through mediation.

Rus Hackstaff of Turnkey told council members the company faces a March 1 deadline to close on its deal with Stoner. An equity partner is willing to participate in the deal, he said, at a time when financing from banks is difficult to get.

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Project

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Despite their misgivings, council members voted for the project, saying it would help the city control a major gateway to Fort Collins.

"It's hard for some people to

appreciate, but not everything is Old Town," said Council member Wade Troxell. "We really have to think about our entire city, and that includes the eastern edge."

Riverwalk, which would be a transit-oriented development with a mix of commercial and residential uses, is likely to stay much as Stoner

envisioned it, Hackstaff said, although less intense. The reservoir area would provide a connection to other open spaces along the Poudre River and I-25, he said.

Much has to happen for the land deal to be finalized, officials said.

The city and Turnkey would have to agree on a final design

for the reservoir, which would hold 1,500 acre feet of water. A lined gravel pit on the site would be expanded to accommodate the water.

Turnkey also would have to acquire permits for the reservoir project from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.