

Council members off base with appeal

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Our local economy is a lot like a well — you don't miss the water until the well runs dry.

Despite our recent great economy, the "water level" in today's economic well is getting lower. Sales tax revenues have declined, we just "lost" the regional hospital complex to Loveland, and we're having problems with jobs.

What can be done? Maybe a new firm in Fort Collins? One that would not only help our economy, but also improve our environment and community?

How about a business that creates products to help protect the environment? An organization that would bring 50 or so high-paying, high-tech jobs to our town? How about a firm with an international reputation that wants to locate near Old Town? Sound too good to be true?

Well, a 65-person firm called "In-Situ" wants to move here. Established in 1978 in Laramie, Wyo., the company designs and builds world-class environmental monitoring instruments to "improve the world we live in." Check out their Web site at www.in-situ.com; you'll be impressed.

The four-acre site the company has chosen was formerly used to store semi-trailers and old Poudre Valley Creamery trucks. North of the Poudre River at 105 E. Lincoln St. It's zoned community commercial — Poudre River. It's vacant; just weeds and non-native grasses.

In-Situ wants to create an architecture that fits into the natural environment, with low visual impact and minimum blockage of views of the river. The facility itself would occupy only about one-fourth of the site. There are no manufacturing byproducts. In-Situ only does research, design, marketing, and assembly of parts provided by vendors.



Doug Hutchinson
Community Development Director

In-Situ is serious about the environment. It would:

- Replace the site's non-native plant species and weeds with native groundcovers, shrubs and trees that are drought-tolerant and promote wildlife activity (now non-existent there).

- Create an on-site wetland and wildlife habitat that could also serve to demonstrate its water-quality monitoring instruments.

- Create a connecting walkway to the Poudre River Trail to encourage bicycle commuting and walking trips to downtown.

- Use its technology to monitor the quality of water in the Poudre and provide the data to the city — without charge.

As allowed by our land use code, In-Situ asked our Planning and Zoning Board (P&Z) for two modifications to land-use standards to achieve its goals.

In-Situ proposed a longer-than-standard, one-story, narrow building that runs perpendicular to the river to present minimum faces to both street and river. To allow for such environmentally friendly siting, the building would encroach into the 300-foot buffer zone along the river. Land use code standards already allow up to 20 percent encroachment; the siting would require 30 to 45 percent.

On Dec. 19, P&Z voted 7-0 to approve the modifications and allow In-Situ to come here.

So Fort Collins will have a crown jewel of a high-tech, environmentally oriented business, right? Wrong. On Jan. 21, Council members Eric Hamrick and David Roy filed an appeal of P&Z's approval. They want to stop In-Situ from coming here.

Why? Their filing states it's because Fort Collins cannot ease land use code standards. Never mind P&Z's rigorous assessment and unanimous vote of approval. Even P&Z's Glen Colton, a staunch environmental guardian, voted approval, stating: "... this is a great company and ... would be good to Fort Collins."

Have Hamrick's and Roy's oft-demonstrated anti-business and anti-growth stands led them to undermine the P&Z process to blindly reject a firm like In-Situ? If In-Situ is unacceptable, what business could possibly ever locate here?

City Council will vote on the Hamrick-Roy appeal at its Feb. 4 meeting (Hamrick and Roy get to vote, too.) This is an extraordinary event — the first such appeal initiated by any council member in more than seven years.