

'This is our Selma moment'



George Floyd's brother Philonise Floyd wipes his eyes during a news conference, Tuesday, April 20, 2021, in Minneapolis, after the verdict was read in the trial of former Minneapolis Police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez)

Motorsports park: Why DOE chose to ask for an EIS

BY BEN POUNDS
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The request for an Environmental Impact Statement was

the reason developer H.E. "Rusty" Bittle of Hardin Valley Land Partners said he

wanted to move his proposed motorsports park from Oak Ridge to another community.

The U.S. Department of Energy requested that

In emailed statements, Claire A. Sinclair, public affairs and audit coordinator for the DOE Oak Ridge National Laboratory Site Office, explained their reasoning for requiring that study. She also explained that not all planned developments



Bittle

the same problems.

"Use of land at Horizon Center that is not DOE-owned and that conforms with the approved land-use restrictions would not require further review," she stated in an email response to The Oak Ridge.

She said land uses allowed within current restrictions would include light and heavy manufacturing and processing plants; research and development facilities; warehousing and wholesaling facilities; public or semi-public uses, including utility structures; offices; and service industries.

These types of developments, would though, as Sinclair stated, need to avoid the DOE-managed exclusion areas within Horizon Center and instead only use land currently managed by the Oak Ridge Industrial Development Board.

PARK:

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The proposed motorsports park was mostly going to be located on parcels of land on the west side of Oak Ridge that are set aside for industrial and office development and managed by the Oak Ridge IDB. Those parcels of land are within the Horizon Center.

However, plans showed for the motorsports park track to cross protected areas in between these parcels, designated as "natural areas" or "exclusion areas." Bittle needed DOE's approval regarding these areas specifically in order to go ahead with his project. DOE has "ownership and control" of these natural areas, according to an Energy Department online document.

These natural areas within Horizon Center are not the same as the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement (BORCE), a separate protected area, which would have also been near the proposed motorsports park. However, the park's effects on the BORCE, particularly with regard to noise, were also a concern for the motorsports park's critics.

DOE at first wrote a draft Environmental Assessment last year which was in favor of the motorsports project.

It stated that allowing a proposed motorsports complex in west Oak Ridge won't cause "significant impact" with regard to environmental issues, but did cite a few concerns, specifically with regard to the effects on the natural areas.

"The removal of vegeta-

tion such as mixed pine hardwood forests, second-growth loblolly pine forests, tall fescue and sensitive beech-maple forests within the NAs (natural areas) would result in permanent habitat loss and could potentially increase fragmentation by reducing habitat connectivity," it stated.

It recommended the developer avoid crossing "sensitive" areas, including a beech maple forest, limestone barrens and two walnut plantations.

The federal agency sought comments on the matter. People who made comments got an email in response from John C. Shewairy, assistant manager for reservation management, in response. Sinclair confirmed this email's authenticity to The Oak Ridger.

The email announced

that DOE was going to require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), a more detailed report about the environmental impacts the project might have than the earlier one DOE prepared. Shewairy stated the Oak Ridge IDB would need to pay for the project, although an official news release from Hardin Valley Land Partners stated that Bittle was afraid his company might eventually shoulder some of the financial burden.

The email, like the earlier report, spoke about the effect on the natural areas, but also of a change in land use restrictions. "After consideration of your comments as well as further review and assessment of available information and input from our subject matter experts, we have concluded that changing the land-use re-

striction at Horizon Center for the proposed activity may pose a risk of potential significant impacts to the DOE natural areas and other conservation land holdings in close proximity," it stated.

The Oak Ridger asked about whether the issue was the use of the land for motorsports instead of light industry as originally designated, or if the issue was the crossing of the natural areas.

Sinclair responded by generally saying it was "the proposed change in use of the land." Her responses referred to both the effect on the DOE-owned natural areas and the changes to the land use restrictions.

"Use of land at Horizon Center that is not DOE-owned and that conforms with the approved land-use restrictions would not

their goals and just be better."

West grew up around firefighters. The Oneida native's interest in fire sparked in high school.

"My brother got me into it when we were younger. He was a volunteer firefighter when I was in high school and one time that I

came an EMT in May 2015, and earned his Master of Science in Executive Fire Leadership & Disaster Preparedness from Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona, in July 2019.

"I hope to become a Chief someday - whether it's battalion or chief of a

the hard work and dedication Shay has shown in his time with our department," Chief Solomon stated. "His enthusiasm for training will continue to set our department apart from others and provide Oak Ridgers the best fire protection possible."

ORFD:

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In 2004, he joined ORFD as a firefighter, but he always had the longing to become a battalion chief.

"My goal has always

and the city and is going to excel in this new role," said Oak Ridge Fire Chief Travis Solomon. "He continues to show his dedication to the Oak Ridge Fire Department and his many years of experience in the fire service will help our Department keep Oak

iversity, where he also received his Associate of Science in Fire Science in October 2019.

Among his many certifications and trainings, he has completed National Fire Academy courses for command and control of incident operations, fire

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