

DeKalb Buying Commercial Property Around PDK Airport, CEO Says No Deal With Chamblee

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Last month, DeKalb County commissioners approved the work authorization for the county to purchase four commercial properties near Peachtree DeKalb Airport. The properties include 3302 West Hospital, which contains a vacant house zoned commercial; a vacant property at 3296 West Hospital, the Taqueria restaurant at 3290 West Hospital and a furniture store at 2290 Chamblee-Tucker Road.

In early December, Airport Director Lee Rimmel told county commissioners that the buyout would be for safety reasons. The buyout would allow the expansion for the Runway Protection Zone (RPZ). The buyout will help protect people, property and aircraft operations, Rimmel said.

The FAA is making \$3 million available for the project although actual acquisition costs are not yet known. Rimmel said the FAA had not made funding available to buyout commercial property until now. The county's Airport Enterprise would have to front the money for the buyout and the county fund would probably be reimbursed for about 95 percent of the buyout amount, Rimmel said.

Rimmel told the commissioners that the use of eminent domain might be necessary for one or more of the properties, however the property would not be for private development or to expand the airport. The structures on the property would be demolished once acquired by the county. He also suggested that the county draft a lease agreement with the City of Chamblee to maintain the property.

"Chamblee wants to use the property as passive greenspace," Rimmel said. "It is adjacent to the International Village."

CEO Vernon Jones did not approve of the discussions.

"Please refrain from those discussions," Jones said. "Stay out of this. You are getting pulled into something," Jones said referring to Chamblee's ambitions to annex parts of unincorporated DeKalb County.

Chamblee Mayor Eric Clarkson said the city wanted to maintain the commercial property and the 100 county-owned acres around the buyout property because currently, it is in deplorable shape.

"We have been doing a great job in enforcing our code," Clarkson said. "We wouldn't let a private property owner keep the property in the shape the county keeps it. We just want to clean it up and make it look nice."

Clarkson said the city is particularly concerned because the property is adjacent to the planned International Village, which will contain 500,000 square feet of upscale commercial and retail property.

“The International Village will be a state of the art marquee development with a real ugly piece of property next to it,” Clarkson said. “I am all about how we can get our governments to work together more. It doesn’t make sense that we are always at a loggerhead with the county.”

Clarkson said the city’s proposal had nothing to do with its desire to annex county property, noting that the county’s property is already in the city limits.

“I don’t see how he could draw a line us with us taking over maintenance of the property that is already in the city,” Clarkston said. “I don’t know what that man is thinking.”

Executive Assistant Richard Stogner said current the issues of Chamblee being involved with the property is moot. Now the county must take steps to appraise the property to determine its market value. The buyout process includes interviews with property owners and tenants, relocation plan, environmental soil analysis and then appraisal—two are done for occupied property, one for vacant property. Rimmel estimated that it would cost \$161,500 to complete the buyout planning phase.