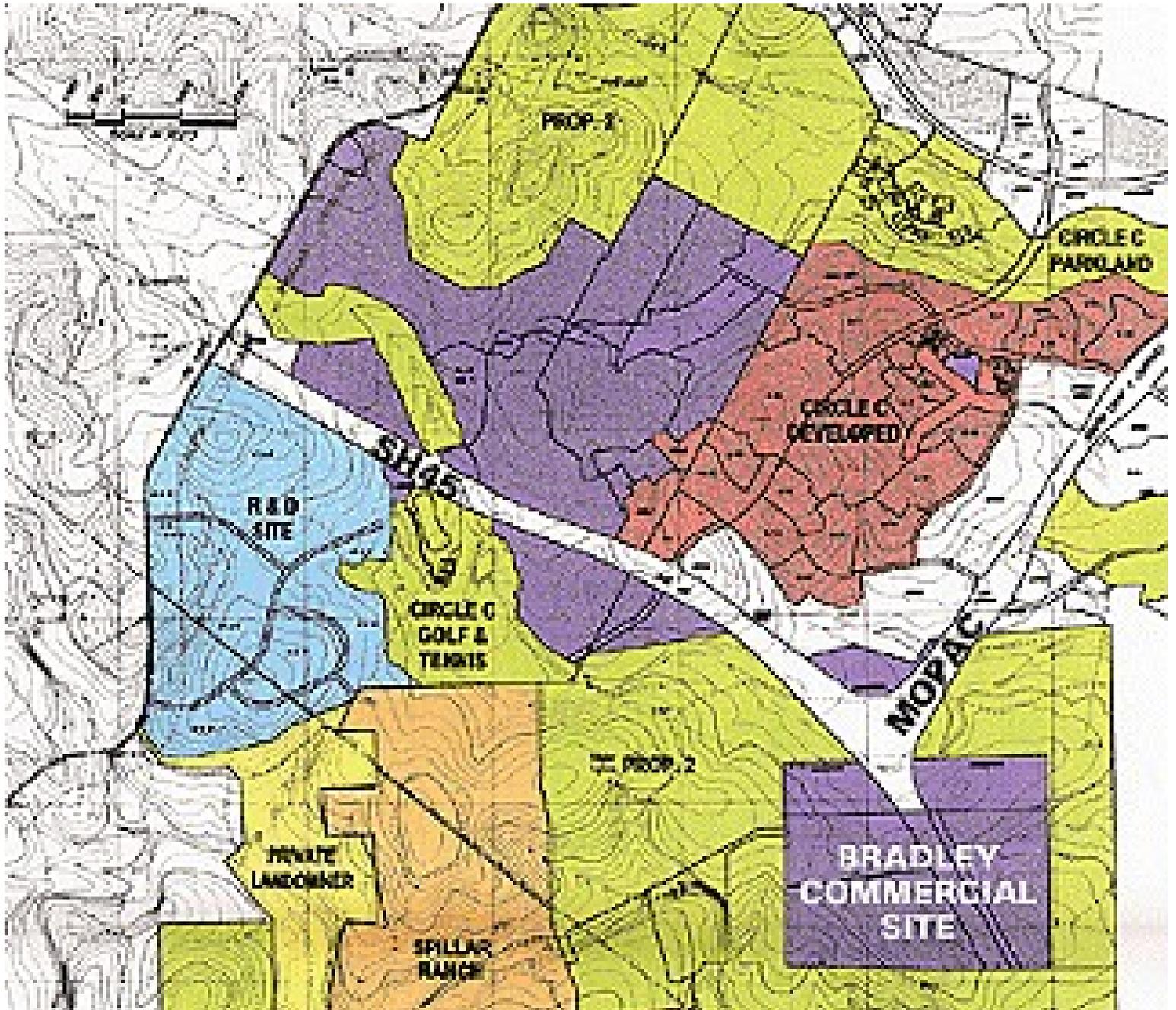


NEWS

Naked City

Talking Swap

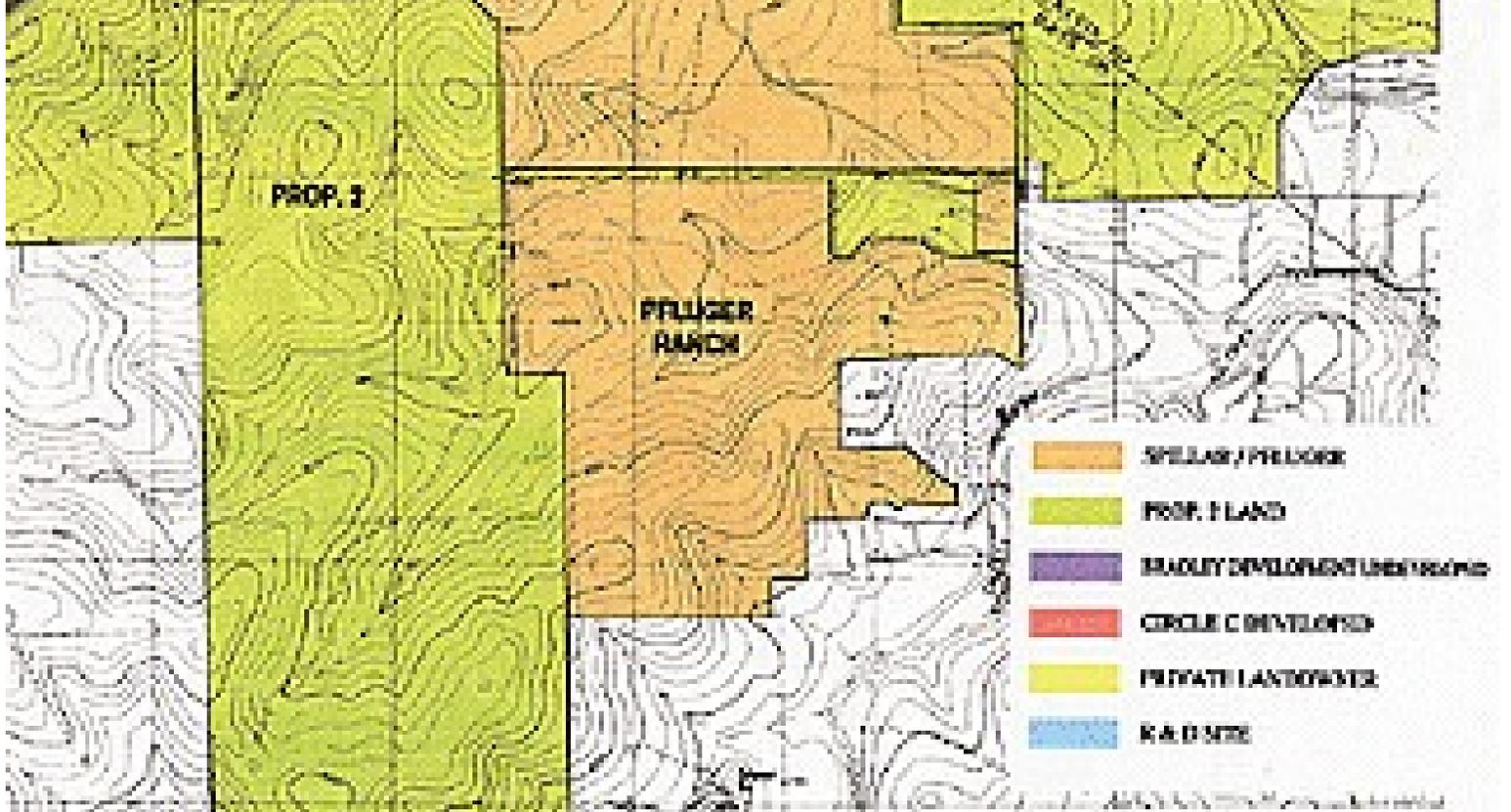
FRI., AUG. 18, 2000



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If you thought developer **Gary Bradley** was done wheeling and dealing after his landmark **Circle C** agreement with the city of Austin in March, pinch yourself ... hard. He's back.

Bradley has begun a campaign to solidify the profitability of his developments by creating what environmentalists call "Bradleyville," a series of upscale residential subdivisions that feed an as-yet-unnamed major employer. Bradley also intends to limit his competition to the south. And part of that effort is donning a green attitude to appeal to environmentalists with an enticing land swap offer.

Bradley is proposing to buy the \$3.4 million **Bradfield tract** on the southeast corner of MoPac and Highway 360 and donate it to the city in exchange for the right to lease commercial space at Circle C to a major employer. He also would donate 50 acres east of State Highway 45 and would reduce his commercial space from 1.2 million square feet to 950,000 square feet. The same March agreement with the city that gave Bradley water and wastewater service for his developments in exchange for impervious cover limitations also stipulated that his commercial space could not have a tenant with more than 300 employees worldwide.

"If it's worldwide, that means you can't even have a bank on the first floor," Bradley told a gathering of **Save Barton Creek Association** (SBCA) members Monday night. So Bradley is looking to have that section of the agreement changed, because he says he wants a "first class" tenant for the office space. He says he wanted to come to the SBCA, which endorsed his deal with the city, to ensure he had the support of environmentalists before heading to the City Council.

The immediate reaction from many SBCAers was wary. "I think it's unlikely that what's in Gary's interest would be in the best interest of the aquifer," says transportation activist **Roger Baker**, who also prodded Bradley to admit that the developer's plans would put anywhere from 2,500 to 3,000 homes over the **Edwards Aquifer** or its recharge zone.

On the other hand, Bradley picked a prize gem for his proposed land swap, and environmentalists are glassy-eyed over the prospect of setting this little chunk of land aside. The Bradfield tract sits on the banks of **Barton Creek** and has several features that make it a natural destination for runoff from **Barton Creek Square mall**. The current site owner -- the **Bradfield Family Partnership** -- intends to build two five-story office buildings covering 211,000 square feet. Needless to say, the SBCA finds the idea of yet another towering office building on Barton Creek nothing short of repulsive.

"The Bradfield tract is crucial," says **Tim Jones**, a member of the city's **Environmental Board** who has been following the

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"The Bradfield tract is on a track to be developed It's going to be hard to derail it otherwise," notes **Craig Smith**, SBCA member and a **Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District** board member.

Bradley also added a sense of urgency to the situation by noting that the tract would increase in price by about \$600,000 after it receives the necessary city permits. After that point, Bradley said, he might have to re-evaluate the deal.

Council Member **Daryl Slusher** said Tuesday he was "reluctant to revisit the Bradley deal so soon," and would like to explore other financing, such as the museum bond money. But he added that he had a productive meeting with Bradley last week on the developer's proposal and would be willing to listen further.

Mayor **Kirk Watson**, who also sat down with Bradley to talk about the idea, says he was open to discussing anything that "made sense." But he also says he has no plans at this point to start any official negotiations on the idea, or to bring it before the City Council. "I'm happy with the current deal we have," he adds.

Bradley's offer found a slightly more receptive ear in former **Save Our Springs Alliance** chair **Robin Rather**, who now works with the **Hill Country Conservancy**, a nonprofit working toward conservation purchases. "I want to give Bradley some credit," she says. "He's not slithering around like he's done in the past, trying to get a deal undone in secret I'm not afraid to listen to the merits of this proposal. Let's face it, the Bradfield tract is on the critical list."

Rather says environmentalists who think it would be easy to go elsewhere for money to buy the land are a bit too idealistic. "I'm out there every day trying to raise money for open space," she says. "I will take every acre I can get however I can get it, because it's really tough out there."

Rather's opinion on the matter carries considerable weight, because she was the driving force behind the prohibition against a major employer at Circle C during Bradley's negotiations with the city. "It's the magnet effect," she says. "Just look at **Dell** ... Dell moved out there to its current location in Round Rock and the next thing you know, you have a mini-city." But, she adds, the issue of allowing a major employer on Bradley's land might not be as crucial as it once was, since development at the commercial site would be limited by large tracts of surrounding city land bought with **Proposition 2** bond money.

But SOS, which opposed the Bradley deal in March, isn't enthusiastic about listening to another Bradley proposal. "This is vintage Bradley," says **Grant Godfrey**, staff attorney for SOS. "He goes to the city and gets what he wants, and when his business plan changes, he goes back and asks for more."

And Bradley isn't likely to take no for an answer. He told the SBCA that he would also be willing to consider donating land to the city from his holdings on the **Pfluger tract** in Hays County. The land, southwest of his proposed commercial development, is the site of a proposed extension of **Escarpment Boulevard**. Since a proposal to extend MoPac was stopped by Hays County environmentalists, the boulevard would be the only access point to thousands of acres of land slated for development on the **Rutherford Ranch** tracts to the south. Bradley maintains that if the city owned the land, it could more easily keep Escarpment a minor two-lane road, thus keeping traffic out of his subdivisions. "I'm not looking forward to carrying that traffic through an upscale residential neighborhood," he said.

The developer noted that his efforts to keep traffic out would serve his purposes while helping the city build a "sprawl wall" to limit development in rural Hays County. And he said he would be willing to work with environmentalists on a legislative effort to give counties near urban areas zoning power.

Still, all the progressive ideas spewing from Bradley Monday did little to endear him to his audience. Baker notes that if Bradley thinks the SBCA views him as a "born-again environmentalist," he's seriously mistaken.

Bradley counters that he simply wants the SBCA to consider his proposals on their own merit. "I didn't think of coming in here for a pep rally," he says.

-- Rob D'Amico

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