

Jefferson County citizens petition for end to annexation

By CHRIS BROWN
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

CHARLES TOWN — A proposed annexation by the city of Charles Town drew sharp criticism at Monday night's City Council meeting, where more than 600 signatures of a petition by Jefferson County citizens were submitted.

The petition asks Charles Town leaders to cease the annexation of housing developments until the City Council and the County Commission can come up with a joint planning body.

Theresa Eisenman, of South Samuel Street in Charles Town, read a statement during the public comment portion of the meeting, saying the more than 600 signers

were "deeply concerned about the thousands of new homes that will be built under the city's already approved annexations."

"(The signers) are alarmed that the city may continue to aggressively annex virtually any development that developers bring forward — no matter where in the county the property is located," Eisenman said.

One proposed annexation specifically mentioned is one that would take in more than 638 acres from U.S. 340 to Millville. Charles Town's community planner Jeremy Camp said the proposed annexation could hopefully bring much needed business into Charles Town.

Camp, who indicated the properties will

be zoned for mostly commercial use, said the site of the proposed annexation is between two and three miles outside of Charles Town.

Mayor Peggy Smith said annexing the land would bring jobs, business and tax revenue into the city.

Smith, who acknowledged the property was not close to Charles Town, said under state law the city had to consider any petitions for annexation brought before the council. She said it would be "undemocratic" to refuse to consider a petitioner.

"Do we pick and choose who petitions us? ... I'm not going to be the one who says 'you can come and petition us, but you can't come,'" Smith said, adding she did not want Charles Town to be the first city

to be named in a Supreme Court case challenging so-called "pipe stem annexation," which is the annexation by a municipality of land that is connected to it by a road or other feature, but not adjacent to it.

Both Smith and Camp agreed that the council did have the authority under West Virginia law to annex the property should the council vote to do so.

A proposal for the annexation of the properties is set for 2 p.m. on March 16 at Independent Fire Hall in Ranson.

Nancy Lutz, founder of the "smart growth" group, Citizens Reclaiming Our County, said more than 600 signatures had been collected asking the city to cease annexation of housing developments and she believes most of them were from

Charles Town residents.

Smith, who said she doubted many of the signatures the group had gathered were from residents of the city, said Charles Town sent out a survey of its own, and responses are already coming in. She said out of the more than 100 responses received, 90 percent were in favor of the annexation of business and workforce-affordable housing.

City Clerk Joe Cosentini said the city sent out about 1,600 of the surveys last week and had received more than 100 back in only two business days.

— Staff writer Chris Brown can be reached at (304) 725-6581, or at cbrown@journal-news.net