

Cibolo sets in motion toll road f

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The Cibolo City Council has given the green light to a Dallas firm that hopes to construct and operate a toll road — called Cibolo Parkway — leading south from FM 103 in Cibolo to Interstate 10.

Although criticized by some locals and the group Texans for Toll-Free Highways, most residents "are taking a wait-and-see attitude" on the project that's far from a certainty at this point, Mayor Allen Dunn said.

The development agreement approved by a 6-0 city council vote Feb. 28 clears the way for the would-be builder, Cibolo Turnpike LP, to commission feasibility studies on the proposed 7-mile, four-lane expressway that would align with the existing FM 103.

If the studies support proceeding, the firm could then solicit investors to fund the \$25 million project, which could open to traffic as soon as 2020.

"What we're doing is helping them finance this road so their tax revenues can be used for other needs like water, sewer and police protection," said John Crew, company president.

Traveling the full distance in a private vehicle would cost \$2 to \$2.50 in tolls, according to preliminary estimates.

The firm would split revenues with the city after reaching a certain level of net income from tolls, according to people familiar with the 50-year agreement, which city officials said would be released publicly once last-minute amendments are incorporated into it.

"The way this works is the city owns the road and all of the facilities associated with the road that are

constructed as part of this project," Dunn said. "The only things Cibolo Turnpike is getting out of this is the right to develop and operate it and collect tolls."

He added, "It's very important for people to know that the city is not putting one red cent into this, and that any expenses the city has incurred to this point will be reimbursed. No local, state or federal taxpayer money is going into this project."

The new toll road would constitute the long-planned southern leg of FM 103, which currently runs from Interstate 35 to just north of FM 78. The city has tried unsuccessfully for years to secure state funding to construct that section.

Although the city has

committed to the venture, Dunn said the development agreement allows Cibolo Turnpike LP to walk away if the feasibility studies don't justify the project or if inadequate commitments are received from investors.

Crew and Dunn both disputed claims made by Texans for Toll-Free Highways in a press release issued March 1.

It accused city officials of keeping the project secret from the public before the Feb. 28 vote, of approving the project out of desperation for economic development, and of seeking with the project to drive farmers off their land to allow construction of big-box stores.

"This little town got completely out-lawyered," Terri Hall, president of the