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* * PRESS RELEASE * *

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TO: Media, News Directors, Editors, and Producers

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Subject: City Annexation Myths

At the public forum held at TRAC on June 13 regarding the possible annexation of the “donut hole” area in West Pasco, there were a number of myths repeated about annexation. The City of Pasco wishes to unequivocally dispel these myths and set the record straight about annexation. The public is encouraged to read annexation questions and comparisons on the City’s website at www.pasco-wa.gov/annexation. A matrix showing the similarities between County and City regulations, as well as detailed cost comparisons, is also online. The public is encouraged to contact the City if they have additional questions.

Background:

Pasco’s Urban Growth Area (UGA) has been defined by Franklin County as required by the state’s Growth Management Act (GMA) since the early 1990’s. Designation as UGA, however, does not require “urban” density throughout the area. A common misconception is that the city wants the “donut hole” (western portion of UGA below the freeway) to be converted to small lots like the “plateau” (above the freeway); that is **simply not true**. The city created its “R-S-20” zone (20,000 sq. ft. min. lot size) to use in the western Pasco area (below the freeway) so that existing, large lot subdivisions could be maintained.

Myth: “My property taxes increase in the City.”

False. In 2011, City property owners paid a tax rate that was 6.1% less than in the unincorporated UGA. So, a homeowner with an average assessed value of \$212,900 would save \$146 annually if in the City. City property owners do not pay a special tax for road maintenance, library or fire protection services as do property owners in the unincorporated area. Properties in annexed areas are not required to pay the property tax for previous voter-approved bonds issued to finance City projects. Residents are encouraged to view the tax and fee matrix on the City’s website for a comparison of all applicable fees and taxes for their situation.

Myth: “I will not be able to continue with my existing land use.”

False. Existing land use will continue in two categories:

1. Permitted Use: Any use of land which conforms to City rules after annexation may continue to exist as a “permitted” use and may be continued by any subsequent owner.

2. Non-Conforming Use: Any use of land which conforms to County rules before annexation but does not conform to City rules may continue to exist in the City as a “non-conforming” use and (contrary to myth) may be continued by the subsequent owners of the property. Two caveats apply to “non-conforming” uses: 1) the use cannot be enlarged (in other words, cannot make the conflict greater) and, 2) if the use is abandoned for at least 12 continuous months, it cannot be restarted by the current or future owner. The intent of this rule is to permit the owner of any non-conforming use to continue it as long as they wish and to recover any financial interest as the non-conforming activity can be sold to a subsequent owner.

Myth: “I will not be able to keep my farm animals.”

False. City and County zoning are the same regarding farm animals (with one small exception, explained below). The City’s “R-S-12” and “R-S-20” zones have the same farm animal rules as the County’s “RS-20” zone, with one farm animal “unit” allowed for every 10,000 sq. feet of property beyond 12,000 sq. feet of lot area (one animal unit is typically 1 horse, 1 cow, 3 sheep or 20 chickens). For example, a lot with 32,000 square feet would be permitted to have two horses, whether in the City or County. The City does limit the total number of chickens, ducks, or rabbits to 40.

Myth: “The City forced people to sign the “water agreements” and will not show them to anyone for verification.”

False. Outside utility agreements are utilized by the City when it allows a property owner of a parcel outside of the City to receive City utility services, typically water. In consideration of the City allowing the use of its system, the owner grants to the City the power to consent to annexation of the property (in effect, voting “yes” to annexation). This is a free-will contract exchange which has been validated three times by the Washington State Supreme Court.

The City has responded to several requests for copies and/or review of individual utility agreements. For example, a request for copies by a donut hole resident of all 540 utility agreements was fulfilled in December 2011. Any member of the public (whether a resident of the area or not) can request, from the City, copies of the agreements at any time.

Myth: “Zoning will automatically change once annexation occurs.”

False. City zoning will generally mirror the County zoning in place prior to annexation. In the City, the “R-S-12” zone (12,000 sq. ft. min. lot size) and “R-S-20” zone (20,000 sq. ft. min. lot size) are the most common designations for properties surrounding the “donut hole” in west Pasco. The most common County zone in that area is “RS-20” (Residential Suburban, 20,000 sq. ft. min. lot size). Further, the City has offered to commit to reflect the County’s zoning under an annexation agreement with Franklin County.

Myth: “I will be required to pay for sidewalks, curbs and streetlights for my property after annexation.”

False. Sidewalks, curbs and streetlights are not required by the City in the “R-S-12” and “R-S-20” zones. However, for safety of school children, the City may install or require the School District or developer to install sidewalks in school zones and commercial areas. A developer may choose to install these improvements in a new housing subdivision.

Myth: “I will be required to install City sewer service after annexation.”

False. Sewer service is not a mandatory result of annexation; annexation only provides the opportunity for sewer service in the future. If sewer lines are extended in a neighborhood (done typically through a Local Improvement District [LID] process), property owners are not required to connect to the system unless their septic system fails and the property is within 200 feet of a sewer line (requirement of state law). An LID requires approval by the City Council and that does not occur if the property owners that represent 60% of the proposed assessments object to the proposal.

Myth: “I won’t be able to burn outdoors upon annexation.”

False. State burning restrictions apply equally to City and County residents.

Myth: “There are no benefits associated with annexation.”

There are several benefits:

- 1. Lower cost of solid waste service* - Garbage service in the City costs less; is “unlimited” (multiple bags and bundles) and includes two free passes to the transfer station annually. Unlike the County, though, all addresses in the City are required to subscribe to the garbage collection service.
- 2. Lower priced water service* - City residents pay 47% less for potable water service (irrigation water is not affected by annexation).
- 3. Emergency response from City Fire/Police Departments* - More first responders serving a smaller area usually provide faster service, and lower ambulance transport charges, as non-residents pay 50% more.
- 4. Fire Protection* - The City will cause additional fire hydrants to be installed over time, improving the ability to suppress structure fires in the area.
- 5. Lower cost for City recreation programs* - City residents are charged about 20% less for recreation facilities and programs and have priority for registration, particularly for swim classes.
- 6. Code Enforcement* - The City uses a five member, citizen Code Enforcement Board to hear and decide issues related to dangerous or unsightly property conditions: for example, weed control, blowing dust and property nuisances.

7. *Lower Homeowner Insurance Costs* - Upon annexation, fire insurance ratings (determined by insurance industry) will improve from class 7 to class 5, which will produce as much as 15% savings on annual homeowner insurance. You should check with your provider to see what cost savings there may be for your specific property.

8. *Elections* - City residents retain the right to vote for County Commissioners. New City residents will be able to vote on important City ballot issues such as Council members and any future bond/taxing issues. The City Council makes the final decision on such issues as utility rates, proposed zoning changes and recreation fees, amongst others.

The City of Pasco strives to continue improving the quality of community life in Pasco.

For more information about the City of Pasco, visit our website at www.pasco-wa.gov.

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