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August 22 2008

Athol CDA votes against zoning change

A proposal to rezone Athol has not been endorsed by the Athol Community Development Area sub-committee (CDA), after residents and ratepayers opposed the change at a meeting recently.

The proposal was to change the zoning from the current plains rural resource area to an urban resource area in the Southland District Plan. This would have allowed commercial activities to develop more easily and would have meant fewer restrictions on subdivisions.

However, the majority of people at the meeting in Athol were concerned further development could adversely affect unique environmental values in the area. Some people did support the change, as they believed it would encourage growth in the township.

Southland District Council resource management planner David Falconer said the final decision on whether or not to proceed with the plan change would be made by Council's resource management committee, probably towards the end of September.

Council had received requests for a zoning change in 2005 and the Athol CDA requested the Council investigate a plan change in 2006.

"The Athol community had asked Council to investigate options after the area had seen significant growth in the past seven years," Mr Falconer said.

Six options were investigated, including changing the township zoning to an urban resource area or creating a new special zoning for Athol.

The urban resource area was considered the best option by staff.

This would have encouraged consolidation of new development within the township, but would restrict a number of rural activities, such as new intensive farming operations.

"The possible changes were not about forcing development to occur in Athol, but were aimed at allowing the community to develop in a manner that would have retained the key environmental values that people hold dear," Mr Falconer said.

"However, nothing was set in stone and the CDA meeting last week saw a decision against moving in that direction.

“However the CDA said they did not want rule out the possibility of an Athol urban resource area ever being established, and they would be happy to re-consider their decision if there was increased public support for the concept in the future,” he said.

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For further information please contact:

David Falconer
Resource Management Planner
Southland District Council
Phone: 0800 732732