

Opinion



GROWTH TARGET 62

Will the Benton County communities along U.S. Highway 62 between Rogers and the state line be the next to feel the boom?

By Kyle Weaver
Staff Writer • kylew@wannews.com

It's 11 a.m. The smell of sausage and hash browns wafts through the air. Two just-ordered eggs crackle on the griddle.

The sign in front of the Hillbilly Restaurant in Gateway promises breakfast, and its patrons line up to order it all day long.

The menu's 16-year-old Stevi Weston hands to customers are representative of typical short-order American cuisine: breakfast on the left, burgers and sandwiches on the right. A dry-erase board advertises specials and cherry and peach cobbler.

With her left hand on her hip and a spatula in her right, Cheryl Swadley stands over the eggs, one eye watching them cook, the other eye on another order.

The third member of the three-woman crew, Linda Makela, is a blur of motion, an efficient ricochet through the dining room and kitchen and back again.

Once Swadley finishes the eggs and Weston adds hot toast and hash browns to the plates, Makela makes a beeline to hungry customers.

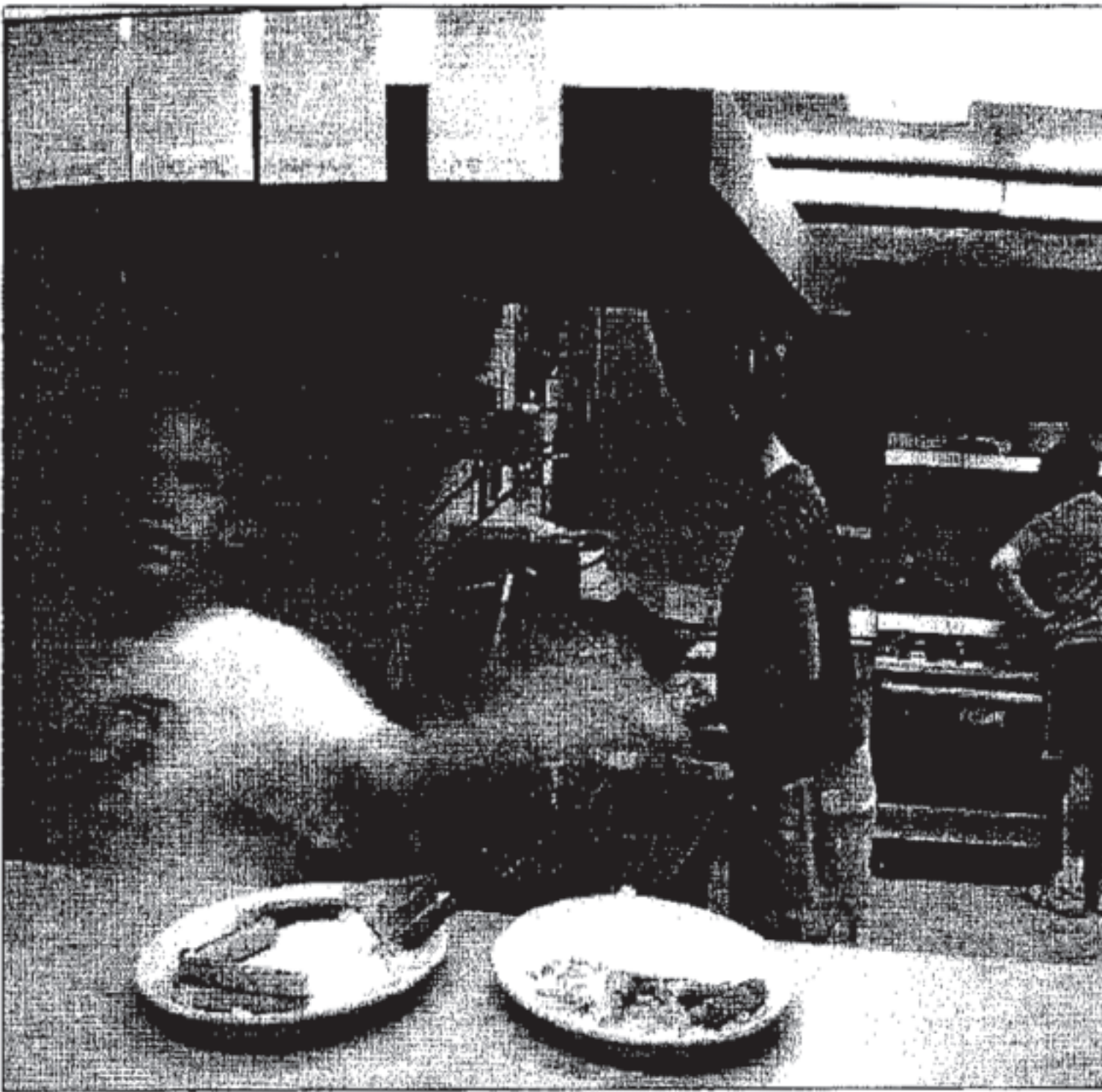
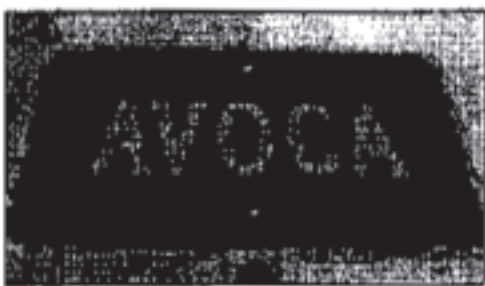
Swadley follows her with both hands balancing full plates. "It's usually not like this," Makela says. "This is slow."

An hour before lunch, four tables are occupied; others stand at the ready. "This table is usually full at noon," Makela says, pointing to a long table. "This one and this one, too," she says while walking around the dining room.

All things considered, the diner's draw is respectable, especially for a town of a little more than 100 people.

But Gateway is on a popular route. It's the point of entry into Arkansas for Missouri travelers descending south on Missouri Highway 37. It's the last stop for Arkansas motorists taking the back road north to Springfield, Mo. It's at the apex of the curve between Rogers and Eureka Springs, well traveled in both directions.

The aptly named hamlet is a revolving door — driven through but rarely the destination. Could that change for the mini-municipality



Linda Makela ripped down a ticket as she prepared to deliver an order to a table at the Hillbilly Restaurant in Gateway on Wednesday. Behind her, Stevi Weston prepared some food for waiting patrons, while Cheryl Swadley attended to the griddle in the back of the kitchen.

and other cities in northeastern Benton County, Garfield and Avoca? Could the growth explosion along Interstate 540 make its way up U.S. Highway 62, where land is still available at attractive prices?

That's the question civic leaders, area planners, growth forecasters

and a group of developers sitting on more than 2,000 acres between Highway 62 and Beaver Lake are asking themselves. All agree that there's potential, but not all agree on the scope of that potential.

The potential spark

It was front-page news on March 24.

Guy McCollum, spokesman for Eagle's Bluff Limited Partnership I, announced from his Fort Worth office that the investors group recently finished a five-property acquisition of 2,365 acres — nearly four square miles. The land is on the north shore of Beaver lake, bounded

on the west and north by Highway 62. The towns of Garfield and Gateway are on the outside looking in.

McCollum said interest continues to be high.

"I must get five calls a day for a lot on Beaver Lake," McCollum said. "I get another five calls a day for a

townhouse on Beaver Lake. We still get 30 to 40 hits on our Web site each day."

The plan is to build the development in two phases. The first phase, on the southwest side of the property nearest to Arkansas Highway 127, would consist of 200 to 250 homes. The second phase, the larger of the two with access to U.S. Highway 62 east of Gateway, would allow for nearly 500 homes on the remaining 800 acres.

The builders won't be coming in overnight, however.

"We will try to keep it at a slow-paced, low-impact style, but the (population) increase is going to occur," McCollum said.

Eagle's Bluff on Beaver Lake could take five to 15 years to complete. Meanwhile, McCollum is telling all who'll listen that the area — Garfield in particular — needs to be prepared for his development, and others.

"They can create quality growth," McCollum said. "If it is disorganized, it will be bedlam 10 years from now."

A fresh five lanes

Standing outside The Buss Stop in Garfield — a Phillips 66 gas station and convenience store — were a dozen men in camouflage pants and black shirts with white lettering in all caps on back that read "POLICE."

They weren't from a law enforcement agency in Benton County. The group wasn't even from Arkansas. They were a dive and rescue team from Oklahoma. For the moment, the Tulsa Police Department represented the largest law enforcement presence in Garfield.

"We're just here for some training," an officer in mirrored sunglasses said.

"Yeah," one of his colleagues said. "We come up here to Beaver Lake about once every year."

The annual trip claim was legit, proven by their decision to pull over at The Buss Stop. They knew about the ice cream for which the store is famous.

Inside, Shirley Laney worked behind the front cash register. A line of

See HIGHWAY on Page 4B



Thanks to a little roadwork conducted by the entrance of Pea Ridge National Military Park, traffic was backed up on a two-lane portion of U.S. Highway 62 on Wednesday morning. As the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department continues its road-widening project toward Garfield, this may become a familiar site.

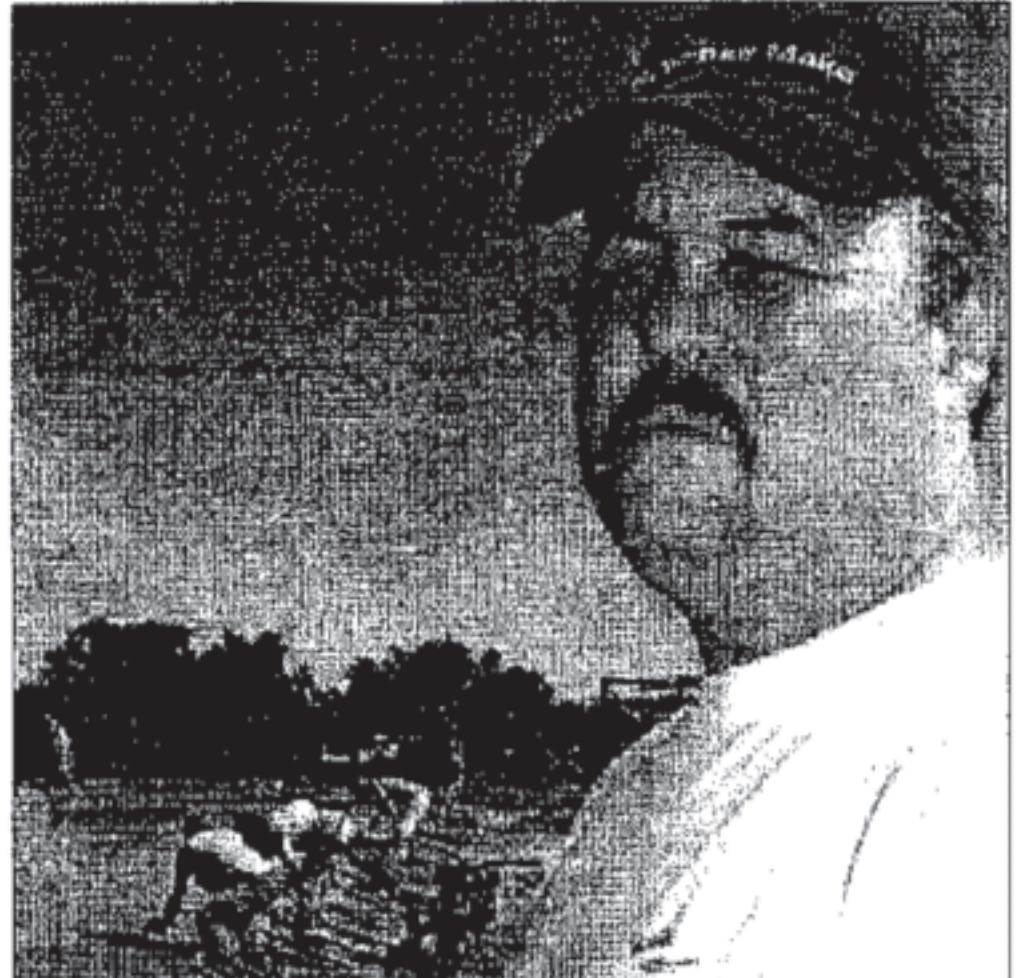
Traffic On 62

Single-day traffic count averages along U.S. Highway 62

Year	Southwest of Garfield	Northeast of Garfield
1995	9,100	7,900
1996	9,600	8,000
1997	11,000	7,900
1998	9,700	8,400
1999	11,000	9,100
2000	10,000	8,700
2001	10,000	8,500
2002	10,000	9,200
2003	*8,900	*7,600

* Road-widening project cited by Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department as reason for decline.

Source: Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department



NEBCO fire chief Rob Taylor is serious when it comes to offering adequate fire protection for the U.S. Highway 62 corridor. A new 10,000-square-foot fire station and community room should be operational by September. Workers can be seen finishing off the foundation behind Taylor.

HIGHWAY

Continued from Page 1B

This area could see boom next

customers dressed in shorts and T-shirts were buying everything from gas to snacks. For now, Laney said, most of the business comes from tourists headed to the lake.

One of the first visible signs that her customer demographics may be shifting is actually 11 miles to the south. Making the commute from Rogers each day, she's seen it for herself: The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department is nearing completion of the first phase of widening U.S. 62 from Rogers to Gateway.

Fresh-looking blacktop five lanes wide stretches for about four miles from North Second Street in Rogers to the north side of Avoca.

"From Avoca through Garfield we're probably a year away from acquiring right of way," AHTD spokesman Randy Ort said. "We're doing the environmental study right now."

According to traffic-count numbers collected south and north of Garfield, there were approximately 10,000 vehicles per day using U.S. 62 in 2002.

The numbers took a dive in 2003, but Ort attributed the count — the lowest recorded since at least 1995 — to people avoiding the widening project between Rogers and Avoca.

Overall though, he said, the numbers justified the project. "I'm looking at these (traffic counts), and I'm thinking the trend is upward," Ort said. "It might not be as dramatic as one would think, but it's a steady trend."

The road-widening project itself has some notable individuals taking notice of the area's growth potential.

Jeff Hawkins, executive director of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, didn't deny that the road widening could have an impact.

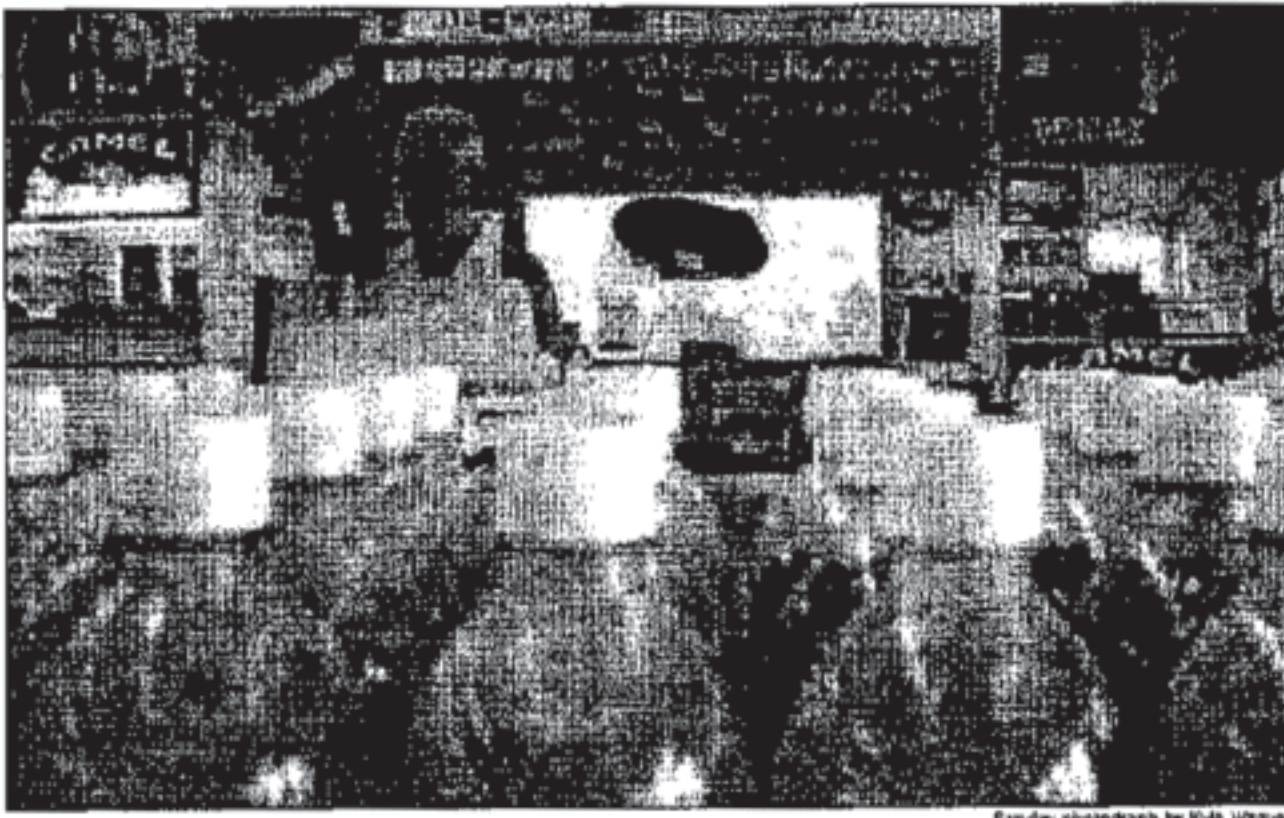
"I think as a general rule, when a facility is improved like that, it will create a more rapid rate of development," Hawkins said.

Raymond Burns, president and CEO of the Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce, agreed.

"I think that probably the biggest impact of the whole area is that most of it is going to five-lane highway," Burns said.

The commode conundrum

The road is just the beginning, and both Hawkins and Burns — as well as a number of other individuals — pointed out that another item would have a greater impact



Shirley Laney worked the cash register at The Bus Stop in Garfield on Wednesday. The Rogers resident said most of her customers were tourists looking forward to a day at the lake.

"Is the traffic there to justify development? Yes."

— Raymond Burns

on the final determination regarding how much growth will take place along the U.S. 62 corridor.

"Is the traffic there to justify development? Yes," Burns said. "Is the infrastructure there? I think it's probably not. Will we see development like in Centerton and Lowell? Probably not. Larger lots will be needed."

Burns said his answer to whether the U.S. 62 corridor will see significant growth is "a qualified yes."

"It won't grow as fast as if it had sewer," he said. The sewer — or lack of it — is the reason for the larger lots. The large lots will accommodate septic-tank systems.

According to Burns, the topography of the land will make a sewer system almost cost-prohibitive.

Hawkins agreed with Burns' assessment.

"They don't have sanitary sewer out there," Hawkins said. "That causes some restrictions, obviously."

How much of a restriction? Rogers senior planner Derrel Smith said that while more homes will go up, there won't be any major subdivisions like those seen going up in Rogers.

"You won't get anything smaller than acre-sized lots," Smith said. "A lot of people will want to live around the lake, but I don't see massive subdivisions out there."

Michelle Crain, Benton County Planning Office manager, was cautious in her assessment of the situation. While noting the impact that a development like Eagle's Bluff on Beaver Lake could have on the area, she couldn't get past the wastewater issue.

"It is really too soon to tell," Crain said. "I think it's limited by its services and facilities that it can offer."

Burns didn't put the wastewater options available into the best light.

"They're stuck with less desirable septic and step-systems," he said.

(see step-system information box)

McCollum wholeheartedly disagreed with Burns' assessment of step-systems.

In fact, he said that step-systems, also known as decentralized wastewater systems, are the key to developing northeast Benton County.

"I think step-systems have been readily approved in over a dozen cases in Benton County," McCollum said. "It's a system we intend to use in Eagle's Bluff on Beaver Lake, and it can be used along U.S. Highway 62. Garfield actually drains to the west, away from Beaver Lake."

The Environmental Protection Agency appears to come down on McCollum's side.

"In the 1997 Response to Congress on the Use of Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems, (the) EPA determined that with the technology now available, adequately managed decentralized systems can protect public health and the environment as well as provide long-term solutions for the nation's wastewater needs." The EPA Web site states on its frequently asked questions page regarding decentralized sewer systems.

Money to build the step-systems shouldn't be too much of a problem either, according to McCollum.

Getting ready for whatever

Ed Clifford, president and CEO of the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce, has his eye on the U.S. 62 corridor.

Here's how he thinks devel-

opment in Benton County will occur:

• First, development will continue to spread west and southwest toward the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport along Arkansas Highway 12 and Centerton along Arkansas Highway 102.

• Second, development will start to infiltrate the Arkansas Highway 59 corridor, which consists of the cities of Silnam Springs, Gentry, Decatur, Gravette and Sulphur Springs.

• Third, just as developers eye cheap land in western Benton County — Clifford noted that he heard of land just recently selling for \$37,500 per acre along Arkansas Highway 12, so the cheap land is definitely farther out — he also suspects that U.S. 62 will begin to see some major interest.

"In any metro area — no matter where it might be — water is a magnet. That's a big lake out there, and it has tremendous opportunities for development. You've got an area that is poised, whether they want it or not, to grow."

The mayors of Garfield and Gateway do want it.

"Gateway is a real small place, but of course we would always like to grow," Gateway mayor Lida Schnitzer said.

She especially welcomes whatever development Eagle's Bluff on Beaver Lake brings.

"Naturally, we are kind of excited about that," Schnitzer said.

Garfield mayor Bobby Flickinger said that growth is already happening.

"To me, it's surprising that it (didn't happen) four years ago," Flickinger said. "Pea Ridge is growing faster than what they are ready for. They are going to be a city of their own. We are going to get an overflow from that."

For a picture of what Clifford believes the near future holds for the U.S. 62 corridor, take a drive down Arkansas Highway 12.

"I think they are a year behind what's happening at the airport, maybe two years," Clifford said.

Interestingly enough, Clifford thinks that ever-worsening traffic in the I-540 corridor will actually have people consider living out in northeast Benton County, when a few years before the thought wouldn't have even been considered.

"If commutes are 40 minutes to Rogers and Bentonville now, Garfield is on an even playing field," Clifford said.

Rob Taylor, fire chief for the Northeast Benton County Volunteer Fire Department, is getting ready for the result that commute equilibrium would bring.

NEBCO is based in Garfield, and it's expanding just to keep up.

A concrete crew was finishing up the foundation of a new 10,000-square-foot fire station and community center on Wednesday.

The current fire station was built in 1979, according to Taylor, and a new one is needed not only to hold more equipment but to also have room for larger equipment.

The fire station should be operational in September, with the community room finished out at a later date.

"I think we are sitting in a good situation right now," Taylor said.

He's keeping an eye on Eagle's Bluff on Beaver Lake. He passes a sign announcing the development every day on his way to work.

"That's going to cause a big change as far as our responsibilities are concerned," he said.

Flickinger, meanwhile, is also trying to cope with current and future growth.

"I'm trying to get developers to build homes that are affordable," Flickinger said.

"Most houses out here are over \$300,000 for a new house. Our real interest would be developers who could build a house say from 1,300 to 1,700 square feet for around \$100,000."

He's also working on the wastewater issue.

"I've been trying to get a grant for a sewer system," Flickinger said. "There are several good systems, and I have talked to a few engineering firms about them."

Asked if some sort of wastewater management system is needed, Flickinger was adamant.

"Oh yes, it's got to happen," he said. "It's got to happen. We can't stay on septic systems and keep growing."

There's also talk of a regional chamber of commerce for an area that would include Pea Ridge, Avoca, Gateway, Garfield and Seligman, Mo. Clifford and Burns have offered their chambers' assistance.

A group is currently in the

FYI On Water

Step-Systems/Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems

What is a step-system, also known as a decentralized wastewater treatment system?

Rogers senior planner Derrel Smith described it in the most simple terms as a large septic system for multiple users.

How does a step-system work?

Perhaps the best explanation was given by the Tennessee Valley Authority's Web site, which took the information from the Environmental Protection Agency:

- Raw wastes travel from the house to a tank where solid wastes are trapped;
- The tank disperses the remaining liquid waste into a main collection pipe rather than into the soil, as would happen with a conventional septic system;
- In the collection pipe, the liquid joins wastewater from other houses and flows to a treatment area located above ground; and
- From the treatment area, the wastewater typically travels to a soil-based disposal system underground.

How prevalent are step-systems nationwide?

According to the EPA, more than 60 million people in the United States are served by decentralized wastewater treatment systems. About 40 percent of all new home construction is served by a step-system or another type of decentralized system.

What are the pros and cons of step-systems?

Pros: Step-systems are cheap to build, have reduced excavation and materials costs, and can be constructed quickly.

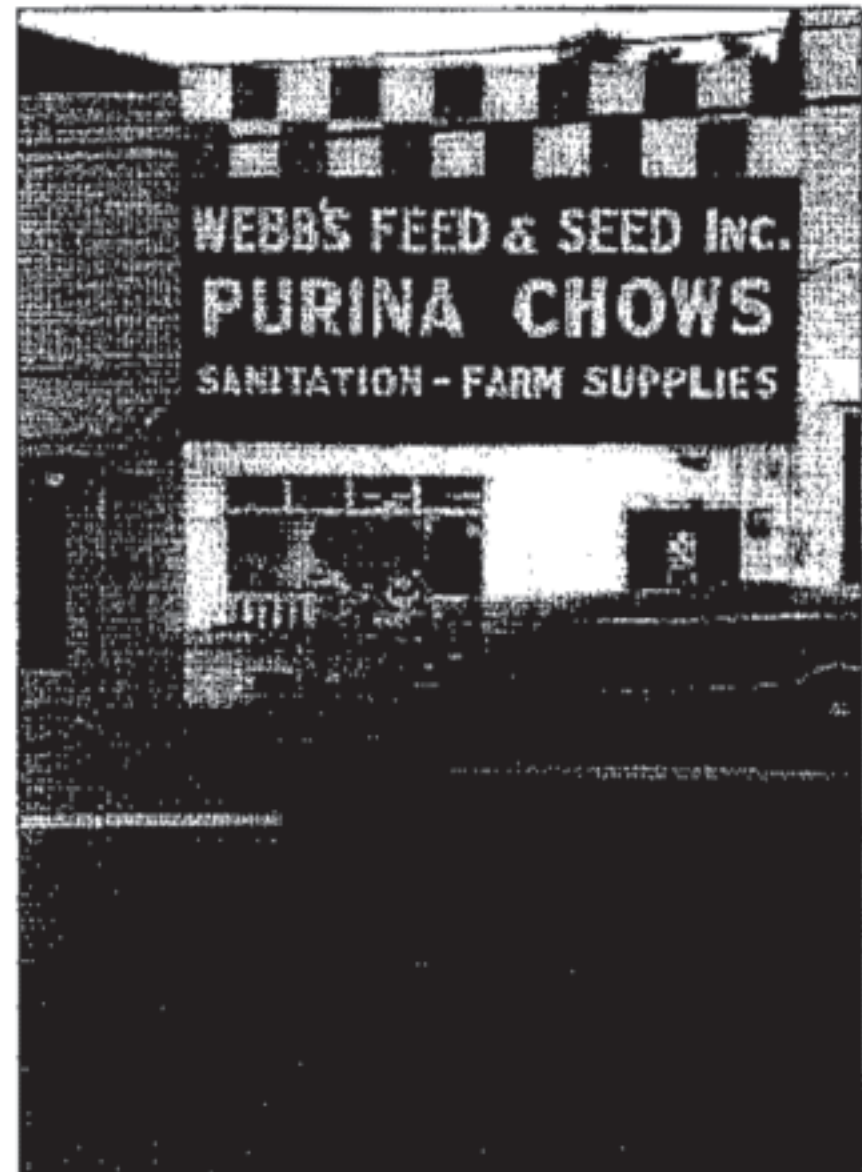
Cons: Failures in step-systems, according to the EPA, are usually attributable to installation at sites with "inadequate or inappropriate soils" or to neglecting to perform routine maintenance.

process of setting out its goals for the collaborative organization.

So what is in the future of the U.S. 62 corridor, from Rogers to Gateway?

Perhaps a cautious Crain put it best.

"Development is slow at this time and I don't foresee it as about to boom, but then again, how many of us foresaw Benton County where it is today?"



More vehicles pass by Webb's Feed and Seed Store in downtown Pea Ridge every day, and the traffic count will continue to rise as new residential developments are completed.

Pea Ridge is able to exist in both worlds right now

By Kyle Weaver
Staff Writer | kylew@nwnews.com

GROWING EACH YEAR

When it comes to municipal growth, it's not exactly "been there, done that" for Pea Ridge.

No, it's only recently entered the uber-development infancy stage from which Rogers and Bentonville have already transitioned.

But just as it sits between the two largest cities in Benton County and a U.S. Highway 62 corridor stretching from Rogers to Gateway that — despite the possibilities for future growth on the northwest Arkansas scale — still remains rural for now, Pea Ridge exists as both worlds in a single moment.

It's strands of small-town America and boomtown U.S.A. twisted together ever more rapidly with each revolution.

Pea Ridge mayor Jackie Crabtree — in some respects — is the embodiment of that dual identity.

Single-family homebuilding permits	1999: 12 buildings; average cost: \$79,200
	2000: 22 buildings; average cost: \$66,300
	2001: 36 buildings; average cost: \$72,000
	2002: 46 buildings; average cost: \$91,700
	2003: 91 buildings; average cost: \$61,300
	Source: www.city-data.com

Being mayor, after all, isn't his day job.

He works for Smiley, too. On Wednesday he took off his Wal-Mart associate badge and put on his mayoral hat for a few minutes to share a little bit about living the Pea Ridge life.

Do you consider Pea Ridge a growing bedroom community or a booming city vying for its own municipal identity among the larger cities?

Crabtree: It's a little bit of both. Mostly right now, the

way things are going, it's a bedroom community. We have a lot of potential to be our own community at a later date.

How far down the road will that happen?

Crabtree: Probably five to 10 years from now.

What are the current challenges facing Pea Ridge?

Crabtree: Besides everything? (He laughed.) One of the main challenges we see is keeping up with the infrastructure as far as roads for new development. Water and sewer are priorities after that.

Was Pea Ridge prepared for its growth?

Crabtree: We knew there was some growth coming, but nothing like what we have seen.

What has surprised you the most?

Crabtree: Just the number of building lots that are going in right now.

What advice do you have

for U.S. Highway 62 areas about planning for growth?

Crabtree: Probably the best advice is to be sure to pay attention to the details. Don't limit what you are looking at to your particular area. Look at what is going on around you.

What's the attitude among the city's citizens regarding growth?

Crabtree: I think the general attitude is that they want to see things done. Everyone's biggest concern is that they want to make sure we do things right. Some people want Pea Ridge to remain a small town. I want to keep the small-town atmosphere too, but if we don't change, we die. I think people understand that.

Where does Pea Ridge go from here?

Crabtree: I think what the city has to do is to start looking for commercial development. Our tax base right now is just residential. We need to grow our tax base for both the school system and the community.

Officials Set U.S. 62 Expansion Meeting

Saturday, Jul 17, 2004

ROGERS -- The public can comment during an involvement session July 29 on a planned 6.5-mile strip of highway expansion along U.S. 62, from north of Avoca to northeast of Garfield.

The informal meeting will be 4 to 7 p.m. at the First Baptist Church Fellowship Hall, 17784 Marshall, Garfield. The public can visit anytime during the scheduled hours to view displays, ask questions and offer comment.

The highway department plans to expand the stretch of U.S. 62 to four lanes. Officials hope to begin acquiring right of way in the spring, said Glenn Bolick, a spokesman for the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

Individuals who cannot make the meeting can give written opinions about the project for 15 days after the session, Bolick said.

The comment form is available online at www.arkansashighways.com or by calling the environmental division at (501) 569-2281.

The project toward Garfield follows completion last month of five miles of improvement from Rogers to Avoca. That \$7.8-million project included expansion from three to five lanes and took four years after the public session to finish, Bolick said.

Highway officials plan future improvement of U.S. 62 from Garfield to Gateway near the Missouri border.

The upcoming work, however, could prove to be some of the most difficult. Between Avoca and Garfield there are curves, twists, hills and bridges in addition to the Pea Ridge National Military Park and a railroad. In Garfield, businesses, banks and a school hug the existing two-lane road. Officials have said they might route the road around obstacles.

Public invited to comment session on Highway 62

By Kyle Weaver

Staff Writer • kylew@nwanews.com

ROGERS — Occupying a place on the pungent aroma spectrum between roadkill skunk and diesel-engine exhaust is the new-asphalt smell most recently inhaled by motorists along the widened portion of the U.S. Highway 62 corridor between Rogers and Avoca.

With the summer sun baking the freshly laid blacktop, the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department announced that it will hold a public involvement session regarding the second phase of the road-improvement project.

The meeting—scheduled to

AHTD U.S. Highway 62 Public Involvement Session

WHO: Arkansas Highway Transportation Department and the public

WHERE: Garfield, First Baptist Church, 17784 Marshall (Highway 62)

WHEN: From 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday, July 29

WHAT: Public meeting to discuss the proposed U.S. Highway 62 improvements from Avoca through Garfield

take place from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. July 29 at the First Baptist Church in Garfield — will allow the AHTD to gather input from area residents about proposed alignments for the highway stretching from Avoca through Garfield.

While the first section of road construction didn't have any major obstacles to consider, Lynn Marlborough, AHTD environment division section head of public involvement, said Monday that there are two areas of concern along the Avoca-to-Garfield route:

- Pea Ridge National Military Park: a 4,300-acre battlefield where more than 25,000 Union and Confederate soldiers fought for control of Missouri; and

- The city of Garfield: a town of 490 people where gas stations, a Baptist church and a landmark school that straddle the highway on both sides could possibly be impacted.

In both cases, Marlborough said that alternative

alignments will be presented alongside a straightforward widening design.

"Primarily, (we're) just avoiding the battlefield as much as we can," Marlborough said. "We've developed one alignment that will bypass the historic battlefield — not just the preserved battlefield."

That route would take U.S. Highway 62 farther south than the current highway.

In addition, Marlborough said the AHTD is considering a number of alternatives when it comes to routing traffic through Garfield, including different bypass alignments.

Garfield mayor Bobby Flickinger said in June that he was against making U.S. Highway 62 five lanes wide through

the center of town.

"If they (make it) five lanes coming through town, it will strip the town, and (we'll) end up with no town at all," Flickinger said. "I think we could handle a four-lane, curb-to-curb, but even a four-lane (highway) would be hazardous."

Instead, Flickinger said, he was in favor of a design that utilized a bypass, leaving the city's core area intact.

According to AHTD Public Affairs Officer Randy Ort, the state is currently working on the environmental study for the project.

"From Avoca through Garfield, we're probably a year away from acquiring right of way," Ort said.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2004

RESORT, RESIDENTIAL TRACT

Large Lakeside Project Revealed

DEVELOPMENT TO OCCUPY 2,000-PLUS ACRES

THE MORNING NEWS

BENTONVILLE — A development of more than 2,000 acres on Beaver Lake is planned and is in the first phase of offering to resort and residential developers, according to a news release issued Wednesday.

Eagle's Bluff, with 2,365 acres, has highway frontage on U.S. 62 near Gateway to the north as well as access to Arkansas 127 immediately south of Garfield, according to the release.

The project is a development of Eagle's Bluff Limited Partnership I and has more than four miles of shoreline and about 6,530 feet of permitted shoreline dockable area. It is the single largest waterfront tract

on Beaver Lake available for development, the release states.

"We have carefully assembled this acreage over a period of five years to maximize its location attributes," said Guy M. McCollum, a spokesman for the partnership. "Eagle's Bluff will be a cohesive master-planned development in a park-like setting with a potential for luxury single family residences, condominium and townhome sites as well as a marina and resort."

However, official plans for any parts of the development have not been formally filed with the Benton County Planning Office, said Planning Manager Michelle Crain on Wednesday. She said, though, she is aware of the interest and has

been talking with master planning developers about it for more than a year.

The development could start either as a subdivision or evolve into a planned unit development like Bella Vista, Crain said.

McCollum said in the release the lakeside development would be known for its deep, clear water or "good water." The property adjoins the Indian Creek arm of Beaver Lake.

Eagle's Bluff Limited Partnership I is made up of real estate investors from Texas, Arkansas and Missouri, according to the release.

For more information, visit the development's Web site at www.eaglesbluffonbeaverlake.com.



THE BENTON COUNTY
DAILY RECORD

Friday, April 16, 2004

Game and Fish may buy 1,069 acres south of Garfield for wildlife refuge

By Travis Greenway Staff Writer travisg@nwanews.co

Posted on Wednesday, April 14, 2004

PEA RIDGE — A little more than 1,000 acres of forest and hills in the Pea Ridge School District may soon be acquired by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for hunting and fishing purposes.

The land is south of Garfield on the northern tip of Beaver Lake. The land has seen little residential development because of its steep terrain, according to some residents at the Pea Ridge School Board meeting on Monday. Pea Ridge Superintendent Mike Van Dyke made the announcement at the meeting.

The Game and Fish Commission originally was considering purchasing 2,253 acres, but is now considering 1,069 acres, according to Vicky Adny, a secretary for the Game and Fish Commission.

The land would be used primarily as a wildlife refuge. Rogers Game and Fish hatchery employee Ron Moore said there are no permanent streams on the property.

Although the land would be beneficial for the Game and Fish Commission, Van Dyke still has some concerns that the sale of the property would mean less acreage available for housing.

Officials from the Game and Fish office in Little Rock declined further comment Tuesday about the land purchase.