

# Blaine council hears about proposed church

BY KASSIE PETERMANN – SUN NEWSPAPERS

Chain of Lakes Church is looking at building a facility in The Lakes development.

The church began to form in February 2009 with seven families who were interested in beginning a new church.

According to Blaine Planning Director Bryan Schafer, the church has been renting space in the Lino Lakes Community Center for a couple of years. The church has about 30 families who regularly attend, and it has been looking for a more permanent home.

Meridian Bank owns a large outlot at the far northwest corner of The Lakes, which was planned and approved for Rottlund to build a variety of town-

homes.

Schafer said the church would generate about the same amount of traffic as the townhomes, but it would be in a more concentrated timeframe, mainly on Sundays.

The bank and Chain of Lakes Church have reached an agreement for the church to purchase about nine acres in the western portion of what Rottlund owned. The approved preliminary plot included 120 to 130 townhome units for the parcel the church is proposing to acquire.

The church would like to apply for a conditional use permit and a re-plat of the outlot, Schafer said. The permit would provide the zoning approval needed to build the facility, although it isn't clear when the



This is the southeast view of the proposed Chain of the Lakes Church, which is looking to build on the far northwest corner of The Lakes. (Photo courtesy of the city of Blaine)

church would build. The property could allow for a phase one, plus future additions.

It could be three to five years before the congregation grows to the point where investing in a new building would be practical, Schafer said. Upon City Council approval, the church would purchase the property from Meridan Bank.

## Church

FROM PAGE 1

According to Schafer, since churches are permitted by conditional use permit in all residential zoning districts, the property wouldn't need rezoning or land use approval other than the conditional use permit.

The proposed project was discussed during the Jan. 12 council workshop.

Councilmember Kathy Kolb asked if the church is envisioning the new facility growing into a school since it's quite a bit of land.

"A school has never been in the conversation. As far as size, we never sell the Holy Spirit short," said Ward Sessing, chair of the Property Task Force for Chain of Lakes Church.

Sessing said the new worship space would be designed for up to 400 people. There would be two services, with a

potential third service on a day other than a Sunday.

"I don't see that this would be that big of an impact," said Kolb. "Churches are good neighbors. ... I think it's a good fit."

Councilmember Dick Swanson said a church in a residential area makes sense because no special zoning changes are needed. He added that he would rather see the church built before the whole neighborhood is developed.

"I don't have a problem with the church as long as we know what it is now and what it's going to be," Mayor Tom Ryan said.

"You have to build your congregation ... and start off with enough space to build," he said.

Sessing said Chain of Lakes Church is a congregation that belongs to the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area. The Presbytery will buy the land and the church will develop the property.

Sessing said buying property in advance of need will result in better choices of land and hopefully better eco-

nomic value of the land.

Schafer said the site currently does not have any access to Main Street/125th Avenue, requiring all access internally from Edison Street. While that is consistent and appropriate for the 120 townhomes that would have been built, it may not be appropriate or sufficient for the church since traffic would be winding through the residential area.

In a memo to the council, Schafer wrote that while historically churches have been built within neighborhoods, more recent experience suggests that churches draw from much larger areas.

City staff and the church have been discussing with the Anoka County Highway Department a possible right-in/right-out access at 125th Avenue to help address the access issue.

Schafer said the county isn't considering full access because there isn't enough spacing, so it would need to be limited to a right-in/right-out access.

Schafer added that the church would

like to modify the site to provide more visibility and access to 125th Avenue. This would involve reducing or removing portions of existing berm along 125th Avenue and creating new berms along the east and south sides of the church site. The berm along 125th Avenue was created to lessen noise from vehicles on 125th Avenue for adjacent residential units.

Councilmember Mike Bourke asked in what ways citizens will have an opportunity to determine the project's feasibility. He said he's received a few emails and one phone call from residents who live in the area of the proposed church.

Schafer said the project would go through the Planning Commission and the City Council, and the church wants to schedule a neighborhood meeting to inform residents of the proposal.

Schafer said on Jan. 23 that the city is waiting to receive more information from the county about the 125th Avenue access before a meeting is scheduled.