



WADE SPEEDS/STAFF

The CVS drugstore and the National Bank of South Carolina branch at the intersection of U.S. Highway 17 and Hungryneck Boulevard have been condemned by Mount Pleasant in preparation for the planned U.S. 17 overpass that would connect Interstate 526 and Hungryneck Boulevard.

Mediation next in property fight

BY PRENTISS FINDLAY
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MOUNT PLEASANT — Court-ordered mediation is the next step in the town's condemnation of the National Bank of South Carolina and CVS/pharmacy on U.S. Highway 17 at Hungryneck Boulevard, attorneys said Wednesday.

If mediation is not successful, the matter would go to a jury trial, the lawyers said.

Town Council voted Tuesday to exercise its power of eminent domain to acquire the properties because it could not come to terms with the owners.

"At this point, it is such that the town has offered a figure which was not acceptable to my client. So there's a dispute," said Howell Bellamy Jr., a Myrtle Beach attorney who represents the owner of the building and the land where the pharmacy is located.

Bellamy said he had offered previously to the town that their differences be resolved through the mediation process. "That's what we're working toward," Bellamy said.

Town officials and attorneys involved in the negotiations declined to discuss appraisals for the properties or how far apart the different sides are in their deliberations on a fair sales price.

The town needs the commercial real estate for its planned U.S. 17 overpass that would connect Interstate 526 and Hungryneck Boulevard. The \$44 million project includes widening parts of U.S. 17 near the overpass. In all, about 35 properties are affected, including some of the land where a car dealership and a furniture store are located, said Brad Morrison, director of the town Department of Transportation. "Some are large acquisitions. Some are simple strip takes. It's nothing adversarial. It's really a process that we have to follow," he said.

Attorney Rick Bybee, who represents NBSC, characterized the town condemnation of the bank property as nothing unusual. "It's really a regular part of the process. It happens all of the time. This is routine," Bybee said. "Most of them get settled. A lot

of them don't get settled until the eve of the trial."

Town Attorney Allen Young said, "Just because we're filing now doesn't mean we're going to court."

Both CVS and NBSC are constructing new locations near the current locations that are the subject of the condemnation proceeding. A new CVS is being built at U.S. 17 and Mathis Ferry Road. The new bank is taking shape next to the Abide-A-While Garden Center on U.S. 17.

In 2007, Town Council voted to condemn land at Shem Creek for a park. However, it later came to terms with the owners of the property, which it purchased for \$6 million.

The town received \$44.4 million from the state Transportation Infrastructure Bank to build the U.S. 17 overpass project.

On Tuesday night, Councilman Ken Glasson made the motion to condemn the properties, which council approved unanimously. "We cannot come to terms with them," Glasson said in an interview after the vote. The vote happened without discussion after a closed-door executive session to receive legal advice regarding obtaining ownership of the two properties. Afterward, Morrison said in an interview that CVS is on 1.2 acres and NBSC is on 0.84 acres of land.

Hungryneck Boulevard is a new alternate route in the town that parallels U.S. 17 and is intended to help relieve traffic snarls. It runs from the interchange where the land is being condemned north to Six-Mile Road.

U.S. 17, also known as Johnnie Dodds Boulevard, will be widened from four lanes to six lanes in a Charleston County-run \$70 million RoadWise project funded through the half-cent sales tax. The work is happening for 3.5 miles of the boulevard from the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge to I-526 and Hungryneck Boulevard. U.S. 17 is often stalled halfway up the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge as commuters make their way home.

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