

ELECTION



2004

Brooklyn Park's apartment reduction plan rejected

BY KARL PUCKETT

Sun Newspapers

Residents rejected the idea of the city issuing \$35 million in bonds to finance purchasing and demolishing 900 apartment units in the Zane Avenue corridor in Brooklyn Park.

In the controversial referendum, which prompted strong campaigns on both sides, 20,099 voted no and 11,886 voted yes.

Strongest support for the \$35 million bond issue came in the Central District, where many of the apartments that had been identified for possible purchase are located. In that district, the vote was 5,548 against and 4,522 in favor.

The measure was easily defeated, however, in both the East and West districts.

Tony Pistilli, who led an apartment reduction task force that recommended

Referendum results

Should the city issue \$35 million to finance property acquisition and building demolition to redevelop the highly concentrated apartment areas of Zane Avenue?

Yes: 11,886

No: 20,099

the referendum, said voters were given a choice and they chose.

"Clearly, they said they didn't want to pay for the referendum. Clearly," Pistilli said. "Unfortunately, the problem still is going to exist. Our hope is our elected officials will continue to address the situation and come up with a solution."

The idea behind the referendum was to raise the funding to reduce the density of apartments in the corridor, where

40 percent of the city's apartment units are located. By reducing the density, city officials were hoping to attract more developers and boost property values.

Opponents, however, argued that knocking down the apartments would hurt residents who need affordable housing, and the idea quickly drew the opposition of affordable housing advocates and residents who questioned the soundness of the plan.

"It states to me the residents of Brooklyn Park have spoken that they want affordable housing in their neighborhoods," said Pam James of the St. Paul-based Community Stabilization Project, which works on behalf of tenants in the Twin Cities and lobbied against the referendum.

Community Stabilization was one member of a group called the Committee to Defeat the Referendum.

The group coordinated a campaign to

register voters and get them to the polls. "I think it was a huge factor," said Caty Royce, director of Community Stabilization.

The failure of the referendum won't stop redevelopment "because there's a lot of redevelopment Brooklyn Park has to have done to move forward," said Community Development Director Bob Schreier. Schreier called the referendum a unique approach to funding development.

"So now, we'll look at traditional means I'm used to doing and we've been successful in doing," Schreier said.

Good has come from the process, he said. For example, the task force's work has led to discussions with a group of minority real estate agents who are interested in providing more home ownership opportunities in the area, Schreier said.