

The Capital

South County

Plans for Churchton grocery store unveiled

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

The owner of a small grocery store in Deale has unveiled plans to build a larger store and possibly a pharmacy up the road in Churchton, which allayed some nearby homeowners' concerns.

At a public meeting late last month, owner Dean Monkelein, president of Amy Foods, had engineers run through the basic details of the company's plan to build an 18,000-square-foot grocery store, nearly four times as big as the current Deale FoodRite, but substantially smaller than the major chain grocery proposed years ago.

The meeting at Deale Elementary School brought out dozens of people seeking details of the plan, which was first reported three years ago when the company bought the 28-acre property, site of the old Miller's Garage, for \$1.2 million.

Presenters included officials from Wilkerson and Associates, who are designing the project, and Dick Christopher, who used to manage the FoodRite. They explained that only the 3.9 acres closest to Shady Side Road are zoned for the commercial enterprise and the rest would not be disturbed.

Local residents - many from the Cedarlea neighborhood behind the site - were glad to hear that.

"All in all, I feel better personally and for the community," said Greg Jewell, president of the neighborhood association. "They seemed to be open to suggestions and listened to our concerns. They seem to want to meet our needs as best they can while still building the store."

He said he was impressed that one of the engineers toured the neighborhood after the evening meeting to see the night sky in reaction to one issue, light pollution from the project.

"He clearly understood and appreciated the concern, and agreed that light filling the sky and blocking the night sky is not a pleasant thing to see," Mr. Jewell said.

The other major concern was stormwater.

Several neighbors said during the meeting that the ground, normally wet under all but drought conditions, is easily saturated, and the addition of parking lots and a nearly 30,000-square-foot building would exacerbate the stormwater problem they already have.

Roland Joun, president of Wilkerson and Associates, told the crowd that the project would use an underground system that can manage a once-in-a-decade storm, reducing flows from such a storm to a trickle. That will exceed county regulations, which require a development to handle the worst storm in a typical year.

Another person in the crowd put the water problem in perspective, noting that the whole area around Shady Side used to be called the Great Swamp.

Mr. Monkelein said he aims to meet the needs of the community.

"It is a little bigger store - we are not going gargantuan," he said. "We are trying to build a nice-size store to meet your needs so you don't have to drive miles away. We want to make it your store.

"I live here and am going to continue to live here. I'm not going any place."

Mr. Christopher, for whom the new store will be named, was able to provide a more familiar perspective.

"This is not going to be a monster retail store. With the additional square footage you will be able to get up and down the aisles," he said to applause.

"And you will be able to open the freezer door without hitting someone in the behind," he added, to a smattering of laughter.

The plan includes:

A 29,200-square-foot building, about 18,000 square feet for the grocery and 12,000 square feet for another use, perhaps Friendly Pharmacy, now in Deale.

165 parking spaces covering about 1.7 acres.

A total of 2.79 acres of impervious surfaces, covering 71 percent of the commercial property. The county allows up to 80 percent coverage.

The project will disturb about a half-acre of wetlands, which will be recreated on another part of the property.

The company has yet to formally submit plans to the county for approval, but must do so in the coming months.

Mr. Jewell, somewhat satisfied, was still urging neighbors to be vigilant.

"The best thing for us to do is keep an open line of communications and be sure to keep an eye on what's going on," he said.

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