

The Capital South County

Churchton garage sold to Deale FoodRite

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

The owner of the Deale FoodRite has bought Miller's Garage and Sunoco in Churchton and an adjoining property in hopes of putting another grocery store on the site.

The market on East Bay Front Road could remain open, the manager said, but might offer more of a gourmet line of products to meet the needs of south county's changing demographic.

Nor does the sale spell the end of Miller's Garage, which has been serving community motorists since the late 1930s. It will move down the street and service cars in the rear of Miller's Muffler.

Locally owned Amy Food Chains Inc. bought the 5.5-acre garage site and the 24.6 acres next to it for \$1.2 million last month, according to state records.

"We don't want to get everyone pumped up until things get moving, but we are planning to build a store there," said Dick Christopher, manager for Amy Foods and the Deale store.

Twice he emphasized that the project would be geared to the community's needs.

"We will have a dialogue with the small area plan(ners) and (South Arundel Citizens for Responsible Growth) and others," he said. "We want to do what is felt to be right for the community."

That includes a grocery store in the 25,000- to 30,000-square-foot range. The current store has about 6,000 square feet.

To make the new store profitable, it will require creative design, he said. If, for instance, a walk-in refrigerator could be placed outside the building, "you could maximize the retail space. A 25,000-square-foot store could fast become the equivalent of a (much larger) store."

The project is in very preliminary stages. The Army Corps of Engineers is doing a wetlands study of the site. Once that hurdle is cleared, plans would be submitted to the county.

Mr. Christopher said a revamped and upscale existing FoodRite could be "a complement to the new location. It would take the heat off the new store so that it would not have to be all things to all people."

The two Miller properties, totaling about 30 acres, are split-zoned, commercial and residential. The C3 commercial zoning, which allows for grocery stores, is on land that fronts Shady Side Road, occupying roughly one-third of the deep lots that back up to the

Cedarlea neighborhood. The rest is residential and, like much of the area, wet.

The commercial zone runs along Shady Side Road, ending within the property, just shy of the old airstrip built by the Miller family 75 years ago.

The family has been operating its gas station and garage for two generations.

"The story is we had to sell it off to settle the estate and pay inheritance taxes and such," said Joe Miller, who runs the garage his father built.

They hated to have to sell.

"I was born here," said Mr. Miller, who came into this world in the apartment above the garage 65 years ago. "We just had to do it."

Miller's Garage stopped selling gas just after the deal was signed on April 29 and will close in the next month or so.

"Everybody who comes in here is saying, 'You're gone,'" Mr. Miller said. " But that's not so - we're just moving up the street."

The old Miller property at 5570 Shady Side Road sits across from the site of the former Smith's Building Supply, which was bought by a subsidiary of Safeway Inc. when that company was trying to build a store in Deale.

The Smith site and the former Deale Safeway site at the intersection of routes 256 and 258 are the only two spots in the area that would support a large grocery store, county planner Vivian Marsh said.

"But the community decided a grocery should not be that large," he said referring to the fight over the 77,000-square-foot grocery and other stores Safeway proposed.

FoodRite, then under different ownership, was one of the players fighting the Safeway plan right across the street.

"A store of limited size would be more in keeping with what the community wanted anyway," Mr. Marsh said.

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