

The Capital

Top Stories

Proposed Target stalled by public meeting rule

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

In May, a developer met with several south county residents to explain plans for a 27-acre shopping center and Target in Waysons Corner, thinking it fulfilled new county rules requiring a public meeting before plans are submitted for official approval.

Apparently it did not.

County officials will hold up review of a site plan submitted by Petrie Ross Ventures until another meeting, more widely publicized, is held to satisfy notice requirements included in the law that took effect in February.

"Planning and Zoning did not get written notice of the public meeting," said Pam Jordan, spokesman for the county Office of Planning and Zoning. "The project is on hold until the developer holds a meeting in accordance with the law."

The rules that took effect in February require that people living within 125 feet of a project be notified, in writing, of a meeting at least 21 days before it's held. They also mandate that planning and zoning officials and the local County Council member be similarly informed.

That apparently didn't happen in this case.

"I found out the day before," said County Council Chairman Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, who represents deep south county.

Walt Petrie, an Annapolis-based developer, couldn't be reached for comment on the county's decision to require a public meeting.

He didn't attend the May meeting, but he met in June with local representatives to discuss the project. Earlier this week, he said he wouldn't mind meeting with a group of similar size "to go over all concerns" again.

"I am happy to cooperate, listen and make changes," he said. "But I am in no mood to stand in front of 500 people. I have been through that before."

Two years ago he stood before a large crowd in Deale when he proposed a mixed-use shopping and town house project. The crowd's raucous reaction to his plan caused him, in part, to back out of that project.

"The bottom line is, I have a piece of property that has the zoning," Mr. Petrie said of the new project. "I am not asking for any variances. Everything I am proposing is an allowed use."

Petrie Ross Ventures submitted plans to the county for part of the shopping center and applied for a grading permit

July 6. That covers only the 128,531-square-foot Target, 559 parking spaces and other details.

Plans will be submitted later for other stores in the shopping center, restaurants, a bank and more parking along Southern Maryland Boulevard, which runs parallel to Route 4, the main road linking Calvert County to Washington.

The project will total close to 500,000 square feet for buildings and parking, that will translate to roughly 23 acres of impervious surface where 30 acres of woods now stand.

Hopes for the shopping center hinge on drawing people from outside the county as they zoom by on their daily rounds.

Andrew Gaeta of Lothian hosted the meeting with Mr. Petrie two weeks ago. He and others worry about traffic coming down rural Route 408, a sure path to the new center for many south county residents and others coming from the north.

"We need it," said Ruth Collins, who owns a small house next to the site. "But it is going to cause problems, like traffic."

Mr. Petrie said his traffic study indicates that the local road will continue to function at a high level and roads near the site will continue to operate at service level A, the highest rating for an intersection or road.

"It will have very little impact on local roads," he said.

Other concerns include the impact on nearby Galloway Creek, which skirts the northern section of the Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary, and the South County Small Area Plan.

Mr. Gaeta said the Target project goes against the vision of the small area plan to keep the region rural.

"If this goes through it could ignite development in the area," he said.

The Target project, along with a move to create a Lothian Civic Association, will be the topic of a public meeting at Southern Middle School at 7 p.m. July 27.

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