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SHA calls for revisions in Target traffic plan

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

Noting major holes in the traffic study for a proposed Target store and shopping center in Waysons Corner, the State Highway Administration has sent the plans back to the developer.

Petrie Ross Ventures has heralded the study as the "science" backing their plans and a counterpoint to area residents "emotional" worries about traffic impacts of the plan to build the shopping center off a two-lane road adjoining busy Route 4.

Lothian Civic Association President Andrew Gaeta said the SHA action backs what the fledgling organization and an independent traffic engineer have said about the plan.

"Like we've been saying all along, this site is inappropriate for what they have in mind," he said. "And it is certainly inappropriate from a traffic standpoint."

The Annapolis-based developer has submitted plans for half of its proposed shopping center, including the Target store and a corresponding 550 parking spaces. Another section of shopping with restaurants and a bank will be submitted later.

In general the plan calls for traffic, up to 3,500 cars during the week and 7,500 on the weekends, to use a short ramp off of northbound Route 4 to enter the center. Exiting traffic would use two-lane Southern Maryland Boulevard to head to one of two multi-road intersections over a half-mile away in both directions.

Terry Richardson, vice president of Annapolis-based Petrie Ross Ventures, said there was nothing out of the ordinary.

"This is standard fare... Our traffic engineer was with SHA and has as good an understanding as anybody. Invariably an individual reviewer is likely to see XYZ," he said.

The company plans to have responses to all the issues raised in a couple of weeks, he said.

But SHA spokesman David Buck said the traffic study and site plan the agency reviewed was missing pertinent information about the nearest intersections, the exit, traffic light and more.

"They had no justification for the traffic light," he said. "We can't begin to determine if it is justified if they offer no reason for it."

SHA officials think the exit will create a dangerous situation on Route 4 as traffic slows or stops altogether in the travel lanes of the highway.

Mr. Buck said highway planners were also very concerned about traffic queueing up in the travel lanes of Route 4 as exiting traffic hits the light about 100 feet off the highway.

"We also have sight distance concerns," Mr. Buck added.

But he agreed with Mr. Richardson's characterization of the SHA's request for changes as the norm, not the exception.

"It is part of the process," he said.

"But we will not let anything proceed before we are absolutely convinced that they properly mitigate and affect improvements to account for their development."

The SHA's issues mirror those of an independent traffic engineer the Lothian Civic Association hired to look at the study. That engineer said the idea of putting a signal at the intersection of the off ramp "could result in a severe safety hazard."

Lucinda Gibson, vice-president of SmartMobility, said elements of the study also do not comply with some standards of the Institute of Traffic Engineers and county rules.

Those included the lack of an analysis of accident history for local intersections and the way the study counted "pass-by trips," those that would already happen without the shopping center.

The traffic study's incorrect use of those figures make the level of service - how well local roads handle traffic - look better, Ms. Gibson said in her 10-page report.

Mr. Richardson said he has yet to see the report prepared for Lothian Civic Association, but he welcomed it.

"There is science there to get the emotion out of it. It is a good thing."

Mr. Richardson said the bypass trip issue is fuzzy.

"There is no firm science on how many trips will have already been on the road."

But Ms. Gibson's report refutes that, saying the developer's treatment of pass-by traffic violates Institute of Traffic Engineers guidelines.

"They subtracted the pass-by traffic from the projected traffic, which is blatantly incorrect," she said.

Those and other issues must be well settled and signed off by state highway officials and county planners before any permits are issued.

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