

The Capital

Top Stories

DNR head questions Target proposal

By E.B. FURGURSON III Staff Writer

Two problems south county residents say will be exacerbated by the proposed Target shopping center in Waysons Corner - pollution and congestion - were underscored recently. The state expressed concern that the project might sully the environmentally sensitive Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary, and a real estate company started seeking buyers for a commercial center across Route 4 from the Target site.

In a letter to County Executive Janet S. Owens last month, Natural Resources Secretary Ronald Franks expressed his department's "concern regarding the potential natural resource impacts of the proposed Wayson's Corner Development project ... particularly with respect to potential storm-water runoff."

Meanwhile, an Annapolis commercial real estate company has advertised a parcel as suitable for office, retail, restaurant and perhaps gas station use directly across the highway from the Target site and directly abutting Galloway Creek - the same waterway the DNR is trying to protect from potential runoff.

"I don't believe we have begun to get to the bottom line on just how much of an impact a project of this size would have on that area, particularly on Jug Bay and the Patuxent River," said Andy Gaeta, a founder of the Lothian Civic Association, which is fighting the plan.

Jug Bay is one of 27 federally protected areas under the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, and one of three in Maryland. Under that designation, and a memorandum of understanding between Anne Arundel and the DNR, the county is responsible for protecting the sanctuary.

A summary paragraph in that agreement reads: "The County shall exercise its duties so as to prevent or to minimize damage to water quality, air quality, land/soil stability and productivity, wildlife, scenic and cultural values, and natural topographic and open-space character of the Reserve."

"I hope that the County will take measures that ensure that the Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary component of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System remains protected," Mr. Franks wrote.

Local residents hope the county will "take extra effort to address the short- and long-term environmental impact as they go through review process," Mr. Gaeta said.

Petrie Ross Ventures project spokesman Terry Richardson couldn't be reached for comment. But according to planning and zoning chief Joe Rutter, the initial review

already is done.

"The plan has been reviewed for compliance with all county and state requirements, a process where the county has the authority to 'exercise its duties so as to prevent or to minimize damage to water quality ... of the Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary,' " he said in a prepared statement.

Mr. Rutter also said Mr. Franks' comments are being taken under consideration as the process continues.

A letter was sent to the developer late last week delineating a number of issues, including stormwater runoff, the environment and adequate facilities.

Protecting Jug Bay also is the bailiwick of the Friends of Jug Bay, an organization of volunteers who support operations and stewardship at the preserve along the Patuxent River. The organization has submitted four pages of specific concerns to the county, including:

Affects on water quality, watershed hydrology, fish, wildlife and vegetation communities, and other degradation.

Increased water temperatures and decreased oxygen in waters affecting aquatic life.

Groundwater table decline.

Runoff affecting certain "cool water" amphibians, fish and reptiles.

Decreased habitat for the plethora of bird species that frequent Jug Bay.

"It is our clear desire to protect the sanctuary, and to work cooperatively with the community's landowners and residents, affected agencies and other stakeholders," vice president Albert J. Tucker wrote.

Across the highway, Murphy Hogan Commercial Real Estate Services issued a prospectus for a proposed subdivision carving the commercially zoned 7.4-acre parcel into three lots for various uses. It notes that the entire parcel can be bought for \$3.1 million, or the separate lots can be had for \$950,000 to \$1.2 million.

It also touts the location as right across Route 4 from Petrie Ross Ventures' Centre at Waysons Corner.

The Hogan parcel was created in 2000, according to county spokesman Pam Jordan.

"There was a perc test on it for a three-lot subdivision," she said, "but there has not been any activity on the property since."

Murphy Hogan agent Matt Daddio said the firm is shopping the property to see what kind of interest exists.

"We've gotten some calls, but there is no paper in front of us, no deal yet," he said.

Mr. Gaeta thinks that kind of intense commercial development is unwise.

"It is completely inappropriate considering its proximity to Galloway Creek," he said. "I think 'buyer beware' is the appropriate thing there."

But the parcel, like the Target across the highway, has the zoning for those uses. Its C3 commercial zoning would allow all prospective uses save the gas station, which would require a special exception.

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