



Mall draws residents' ire

Critics say shopping center would disrupt rural area

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An Annapolis developer is planning to build a shopping plaza anchored by a Target in southern Anne Arundel County, a prospect that faces opposition by neighbors in this rural tier.

Petrie Ross Ventures LLC hopes to develop 21 acres of forest in Wayson's Corner into a 238,000-square-foot strip mall featuring a nearly 128,000-square-foot Target, restaurants, stores, a bank and 1,129 parking spaces.

The remaining 9 acres of the site, at the intersection of Southern Maryland Boulevard and Sands Road next to the Lothian post office, would be carved into a forest conservation area, ponds and landscaping.

The Centre at Wayson's Corner property is zoned C4, the county's most permissive development designation, though Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary is just across Route 4.

For many in this static slice of the county, the plans interrupt "a culture and a way of life," said Andy Gaeta, who, along with six other South County residents, formed the Lothian Civic Association after learning of the Target plan.

More than 170 South County residents poured into Southern Middle School on Thursday night at the association's organizational meeting, ready to mount a defense against the proposed development.

Signs emblazoned with "Keep South County Rural" in big red letters could be seen from all corners of the cafeteria. Neighbors lined up to talk about South County's equestrian landscape, farms, unclogged roads and preserved calm, despite regional growth.

"The last thing I want to do is fight traffic to get into my home," said Dee Bowman, who lives next to the proposed site. "I moved here because it was quiet, beautiful and peaceful."

Traffic, particularly along Route 408, was a concern raised by at least half of the roughly 15 speakers at the meeting.

No representative of Petrie Ventures attended the meeting, but the company circulated a statement. It said the roads astride the shopping center will retain the highest rating for an intersection or road, even with an extra 3,500 vehicles on weekdays and 7,500 on weekends, 65 percent of which are projected to use Route 4, according to a traffic study commissioned by Petrie Ross.

Company representatives did not return calls for comment Friday.

Robyn Day, who with her husband owns the Country Side Deli and Carryout on Route 4, said she's worried she'll be shouldered out of the way if the plan is approved. "I'd like to be in business next year. I'd like to still be here," Day said.

Bowman and Day's sentiments are enshrined in the Small Area Plan, a 2001 land-use proposal adopted by the county. It calls for South County below Edgewater to remain rural, and what little development it tolerates cleaves to community - not regional - needs.

Members of the LCA, which organized Thursday's meeting, criticized the county council for dismissing it as a reference tool.

Peter Perry, former chairman for land use and zoning issues for South County SAP, said, quoting the plan, that "strip malls, national franchises and up-zoning are inconsistent with the rural character of South County."

"This plan is being thrown away ... by your neighbors," Perry said.

But even if the plan has lost its influence, the LCA has a bit of history on its side: Developers in South County have shrunk from strenuous opposition in the past.

Petrie's company backed off from a mixed development in 2004 at the Gates Marina property in Deale after 400 people showed up to vehemently oppose his plan. And in 2001 Safeway abandoned its plans to build a grocery store in Deale because of the objections of the community. Now a nonprofit corporation formed by local churches is trying to buy the 15 acres and erect a community center.

Germaine Harlow of Deale was one of the few in attendance who welcomed the Target shopping center. In 2001 she protested Safeway's plans because she said the community didn't have the benefit of accessibility, as does Petrie Ross's site. And with the county growing as it is, she said, there's bound to be some spillover.

"Change is coming; it's just a fact of life," Harlow said.

A community meeting with Petrie representatives is scheduled for 7 p.m. Aug. 15 at Wayson's Bingo.

The company's May meeting with neighbors failed to satisfy new county rules that require developers to hold a public meeting with residents who live within 125 feet of the project before submitting plans because the company did not give adequate notice.

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