

WEST WINDSOR: Planners stay ruling on Czyner

Fourth hearing set for former Acme location

By Allison Musante, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, December 2, 2010 8:06 PM EST

WEST WINDSOR — The site plan application for renovating the former Acme Shopping Center will be delayed into the new year, after the Planning Board decided at its Tuesday night meeting that the application must undergo a fourth public hearing before approval.

Since property owner Irv Czyner presented his application — the Windsor Plaza Revitalization Plan — on Oct. 20, the board and township professionals have been hammering out the details of his plans for the 13.5-acre property during the Nov. 10 and Nov. 22 hearings. As of Tuesday night, board members and township consultants have agreed upon all aspects of Mr. Czyner's plan, except on the signage issue, which will be discussed at the Jan. 12 public hearing.

"We didn't think the hearings would go this long," Frank Petrino, Mr. Czyner's attorney, said. "We thought the plans were straightforward. But board members have had questions and they're certainly entitled to have those questions. But Mr. Czyner has already gone over his budget on the soft costs of the plan, and we want to end this tonight."

However, time ran out at the meeting as the board and township officials, including traffic consultant Gary Davies, Township Planner John Madden, landscape architect Dan Dobromilsky, environmental consultant Chris Jepson, directed their remaining questions about the site to Mr. Petrino.

Board members said that they have been asking for an extraordinary amount of patience and cooperation from Mr. Czyner and they appreciate how he has incorporated many of their recommendations into his plan.

"As the first major part of the Redevelopment Plan coming before us with a site plan application, it's important for us to set the tone of future projects in meeting the aspirations of the community," Planning Board Chair Marvin Gardner said.

Among the issues discussed, the board agreed against constructing formal trails through the woods behind the former Acme to Borosko Place, and through the Schlumberger property. A trail was considered in detail because it was included in the stipulations of District 7 — Mr. Czyner's site plan — of the township's Redevelopment Plan adopted last year.

In earlier meetings, board members and members of the public supported formal trails as a safer passage through the woods for people who use it for passive recreation or as a shortcut to the train station. But township consultants concluded that it would be too disturbing to natural habitats and may even increase "unsavory" activity in the woods, as Mr. Gardner phrased it, referring to a resident's testimony of thefts, loitering, littering and alcohol-related incidents occurring in the isolated area.

Mayor Shing-Fu Hsueh said if the township still wanted a formal trail in the future, a more comprehensive study would be needed to assess the environmental complications and safety concerns. Linda Geevers, a board member and Township Council member, suggested adding two-to-three-person tables outside, along the sidewalk for other eateries, such as Aljon's and the Bagel Hole. Mr. Czyner's plan includes seating only at the cupola outside the proposed site of Starbucks, at the far end closest to Alexander Road.

"If people want to buy a slice of pizza from Aljon's or a sandwich and want to enjoy it outside, do you expect them to walk all the way down to the Starbucks?" Ms. Geevers said.

Mr. Czyner said sidewalk seating was not part of the plan because of the cleanliness issue — Starbucks, which has submitted a signed letter of intent to become a tenant, has agreed to maintain its own outdoor area, he said. But he seemed open to the possibility of including maintenance of outdoor seating in the terms of other tenants' leases, if they want it.

The discussion about traffic-flow through the center and the impact of a second driveway at Alexander Road, across from Harris Road, was resolved at the meeting. Mr. Czyner revised his plan according to the township professionals' suggestion that truck traffic would move more safely by entering at the second Alexander Road driveway, going behind the buildings, and exiting through the Route 571 entrance. The initial plan encouraged trucks to enter from Route 571 and exit onto Alexander Road.

The public has expressed concern about increased congestion at Alexander and Harris roads, resulting from the trucks-only entrance. But Mr. Davies concluded that there will be no significant impact.

The only unresolved issue is signage. Mr. Czyner's plan includes two 90-square-foot signs — one on the Alexander Road side

and one on the Route 571 side — both 15 feet tall. Approving both signs would require a waiver since the township ordinance permits only one sign at a maximum of 30 square feet. The proposal has elicited much debate from the board and the public about the signs' size, aesthetic appeal, identification as monument signs as opposed to tenant-identification signs, and the safety risk they might pose to drivers.

"Mr. Cyzner has revised the plan to reduce the signs to 81-square feet, but that's insignificant in my view," Mr. Gardner said. "We've been dealing with a lot of waivers from the developer, and if he was in compliance, the hearings would be shorter and the result would be much quicker." Mr. Cyzner's plan will reduce the property's square footage from 59,500 to 58,055 by demolishing two back loading areas in order to construct a circular road connection for deliveries around the back of the buildings. To create a pedestrian-friendly village style, the plan will renovate the exteriors by adding varied architectural elements to indicate individual stores.

Parking spaces will increase from 311 to 342 and the property will accommodate between 20 and 22 storefronts. Mr. Cyzner said future tenants may include a Pilates studio, a music store, a shoe repair store, and "white tablecloth" restaurants. He does not plan to attract a new supermarket to replace Acme.

Close Window