

Village says yes to Meijer supercenter

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

Wednesday, 05 September 2012 18:25

Trustees OK rezoning for 191,352-square-foot store on 5-2 vote despite concerns with 24/7 operation

Plans for construction of a Meijer supercenter that will become the largest commercial building in Grafton cleared a major hurdle Tuesday night when the Village Board approved rezoning for the east-side project.

By a 5-2 vote, the board adopted a zoning ordinance and certified survey map, documents that pave the way for the store to be constructed on a vacant 33-acre site on the east side of Port Washington Road near Hunters Lane.

The board decisions, coming on the heels of a conditional-use permit approved last week by the village's Plan Commission, were made despite concerns from some residents and trustees about the company's plan to have the store open 24 hours daily.

Meijer, a Michigan-based firm that operates 200 grocery/department stores in five states and wants to expand into Wisconsin, unveiled plans in July to build a 191,352-square-foot supercenter, parking for 681 vehicles and two out lots for future development in Grafton.

Although the company also requested at that time permission to include a 2,460-square-foot convenience store with fuel pumps in the project, the smaller building was dropped in response to concerns about its location, traffic flow, noise and illumination.

"This is consistent with the village's 2035 master land-use plan in the freeway corridor," Village President Jim Brunquell said of the project, which will be along I-43 just south of the Home Depot and Office Max stores.

Following a presentation by Meijer officials, board members and a number of residents at Tuesday's meeting praised the company for its reputation as a well-run business known for quality food, merchandise and service.

However, trustees Lisa Harbeck and Jim Grant voted against the rezoning and survey map, citing concerns with allowing 24/7 store hours and the review process. Trustee Dave Antoine also voiced concern about the 24-hour operation but voted in favor of the project.

"I don't know that the village is big enough to warrant 24 hours," said Harbeck, who noted that Meijer has at least four stores in other states that have limited business hours. "I can't go for that."

Meijer real-estate director Mike Flickinger said the company prefers a 24/7 operation because the store will have employees on site around the clock and will be able to serve more customers, including those who work second and third shifts.

Grant said he doesn't oppose the proposed development, calling the store "a great project."

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However, he said the building's impact on traffic, security and the police department weren't reviewed by the Public Safety Committee before the board made its decision.

Grant is chairman of the committee.

"This is a destination shopping area that will draw people," Grant said. "We have a great police department that does a great job, but this will put a burden on them."

Several residents expressed similar concerns, most notably those who live in the nearby Hunters Crossing subdivision. One of two entrances to the supercenter will be aligned with Hunters Lane, which enters the subdivision off Port Washington Road.

Police Chief Charles Wenten told the board he met with Meijer officials and residents to discuss security for the store and is comfortable with the company's plans, which include 24-hour surveillance cameras in and out of the building, remote access to the police department for rapid response and having full-time loss-prevention staff on site.

Even so, board members agreed to have Meijer officials discuss the security plans at the next Public Safety Committee meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 11.

In rezoning the store site, the board approved a request from Greenberg Farrow, Meijer's agent, to change land from agricultural holding district and freeway-interchange business to planned unit development.

Plans call for expanding Port Washington Road from two to four lanes in front of the property and installing traffic lights at the main entrance, projects that will require approval from Ozaukee County. Meijer is paying for traffic studies associated with the development as well as most of the cost of road improvements and signals.

Mike Klingl, a development manager with Greenberg Farrow, said the company had made numerous project changes at the request of the Plan Commission, Architectural Review Board and residents.

In addition to dropping the convenience store and fuel center, Klingl said, the changes include lowering the store's elevation "to reduce the mass of the building," adding pedestrian lighting outside the building and redesigning landscape and architectural features.

Despite the changes, residents of the Hunters Crossing subdivision presented a petition requesting additional modifications. The petition, which they said was signed by more than 100 people, asks the village to not allow 24/7 store hours, reduce the building size and further address safety concerns.

Residents also filed an appeal asking the Plan Commission to reconsider approval of the conditional-use permit, which the village requires for buildings over 50,000 square feet.

Unlike other development projects in the village, including the nearby Grafton Commons, the

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Meijer's store will not require creation of a tax incremental financing district to pay for public improvements.

Plans call for the Grafton Meijer's to have grocery and home-goods departments, as well as a pharmacy and garden center, with as many as 62 employees on site at one time. The building will also have four spaces for tenants such as a coffee shop, bank, sandwich store and vision center.

Pending finalization of a developer's agreement with the village, Meijer plans to begin construction on the Grafton store next year. The store is expected to open in 2014.

The company also plans to build a supercenter in Franklin, where city officials were expected to consider final approval this week.