

Another Saukville gas station? No (again)

Written by Ozaukee Press

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The village has repeatedly rejected a Kwik Trip outlet on prime real estate; it should reject a zoning change that would open the door

A 15-acre parcel of land in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Highway 33 and I-43 has such commercial appeal that it should be a development magnet for the Village of Saukville. What's more, the property is in the hands of a successful, aggressive real estate development company, Ansay Development Corp., that has the wherewithal to make something positive happen for village growth. So why in the world is a gas station even being considered for the site?

The village government has made it plain that it does not want to consider it. Starting last year, the Village Board, the Plan Commission and the village president have said no in various ways to a proposal to allow a Kwik Trip gas station and convenience store on the property.

In August, the Plan Commission rejected an Ansay request to ease setback rules for gas stations. Two weeks ago, the Village Board unanimously rejected a zoning amendment requested by Ansay that would have cleared the way for Kwik Trip. Just last week, the Plan Commission rejected an ordinance change proposed by Ansay that would have empowered the commission to waive an environmental setback requirement.

Now, unfortunately, a chink has appeared in the village's armor. The Plan Commission recommended an ordinance drafted by its staff that would reduce the required setback from wetlands from 1,000 feet to 600 feet, the minimum allowed by state law, and would go even further by permitting gas pumps closer to protected areas if it is determined they pose no environmental risk. The ordinance would effectively open the door to Kwik Trip.

Approval by the Village Board of this misguided ordinance, which will be the subject of a public hearing on Oct. 2, would be a two-fold mistake—weakening sensible environmental protection and accommodating a development officials have said is not what the village needs.

The prohibition of gas stations within 1,000 feet of an environmental corridor or conservancy area was added to the zoning code in 2007. Nothing has changed since then except that Kwik Trip wants to build closer to a wetland that drains into the Milwaukee River than the ordinance allows. That is not a valid reason to change the ordinance.

Environmental issues aside, village officials have been opposed to Kwik Trip because they think Saukville can do better than putting a gas station on a prime site.

The suggestion by Neil Tiziani, general manager of the Ansay real estate division, that a Kwik Trip outlet would encourage other development in Saukville is not persuasive. No disrespect intended to gas stations—communities need them and they are solid contributors to local

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economies—but gas stations do not spur development.

In fact, Kwik Trip, a \$9 billion chain with 580 stations in 10 states that boasts on its website that its “strategy is to be the dominant convenience/gasoline retailer in each market,” could have the opposite effect by putting existing Saukville competitors out of business. One gas station/convenience store is located adjacent to the proposed Kwik Trip site; another is about two blocks away.

Village planners have designated the site coveted by Kwik Trip as part of an entertainment district where a hotel would be an ideal land use. Granted, it could take some time to find a development of that nature. Also granted, Ansay has a development in hand, hence the ongoing pressure on the village.

Tiziani was certainly right when he told the Village Board at a recent meeting, “This is a great location and there is no question that it is going to be developed.”

But that is precisely why the village should not bend zoning restrictions for a development that does not fit its plans.