

Meijer store plan earns praise, raises concerns

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Firm's supercenter project has officials, residents voicing support, wondering about impact on traffic, businesses

Plans for construction of a 191,352-square-foot Meijer supercenter that would become the largest commercial building in the Village of Grafton received a generally favorable review during a public hearing before the Plan Commission on Tuesday night.

But the project wasn't without its critics during a two-hour public hearing in which commission members and residents living near the proposed store site voiced concerns about increased traffic and noise and the development's impact on other local businesses.

Meijer's Inc., a Michigan-based company that operates 200 grocery/department stores in five states and wants to expand into Wisconsin, unveiled plans to build an outlet on a vacant 33-acre site on the east side of Port Washington Road near Hunters Lane.

The firm has asked the village to approve rezoning and a conditional-use permit for the project, which would also include a 2,460-square-foot convenience store with fuel pumps, parking for 683 vehicles and two out lots for future development.

Plans call for the stores, which would be just south of the Home Depot store, to be open 24 hours daily.

Following a presentation by Meijer representatives, Village President and Commission Chairman Jim Brunnquell praised the firm for proposing the project at a suitable site, which is earmarked for freeway interchange business in Grafton's master plan. The supercenter would be between Port Washington Road and I-43.

"The development is consistent with what we're trying to do in the area," Brunnquell said. "It's definitely another retail option. I think it would be a great addition."

However, Brunnquell also said he was concerned about increased traffic the stores would generate and its impact on the nearby Hunters Crossing subdivision, as well as some aspects of the supercenter's design and locations. He said more design work is needed to improve the building's appearance from I-43 and he opposed having the convenience store's fuel stations face Port Washington Road.

"I will not support (fuel) pumps on the Port Road side," Brunnquell said.

Village Planning Director Mike Rambousek said the supercenter is expected to increase traffic along Port Washington Road by several hundred vehicles daily, including a significantly larger number driving through the subdivision at peak hours.

He said plans call for the expansion of Port Washington Road from two to four lanes and installation of traffic lights, projects that would require approval from Ozaukee County.

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Several residents of Hunters Crossing, including members of a condominium association, questioned the proposed site for the supercenter, which would have one of its two entrances aligned with Hunters Lane.

“Having this open 24/7 will mean more traffic, noise and illumination,” said one resident, who also said the project would hurt local businesses.

“This just doesn’t make any sense. We’re also putting in a shopping center that is duplicating everything we already have in Grafton.”

However, a number of the 60 or so audience members praised the project as well as Meijer’s reputation as a well-run company known for quality food, merchandise and service.

“I’ve been to Meijer stores, and they’re fantastic,” resident Tom Grogan said. “I think it’s going to be great for the community.”

Kathleen Cady Schilling, executive director of Ozaukee Economic Development, said the project would enhance Grafton’s reputation as a burgeoning commercial center.

“I see this contributing to Grafton as a retail showcase in Ozaukee County,” she said. “It will continue to draw people from West Bend and Washington County and other areas.”

Mike Klingl, a development manager with GreenbergFarrow Inc. representing Meijer, said the company is willing to work with the village to resolve concerns with the project, including landscaping, architecture and alleviating traffic problems. Meijer is paying for traffic studies associated with the development as well as most of the cost of road improvements and signals, he said.

Unlike other development projects in the village, including the nearby Grafton Commons, the supercenter will not require creation of a tax incremental financing district, Klingl said.

He said project officials have met with Grafton police to discuss crime prevention and safety issues. He also cited the company’s long history of commitment to community involvement where it has stores, sustainability practices and energy efficiency.

“We’re very excited to bring this project to Grafton,” he said.

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

Most of the 33 acres is currently zoned for freeway interchange business. Meijer asked the

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village to rezone all the land to planned unit development.

A village ordinance requires a conditional-use permit for buildings over 50,000 square feet.

The site has several wetlands, including a three-acre area at the north end. However, Klingl said the area would not be disturbed by the development.

Commission members were generally favorable in their comments about the project, with several saying they have visited Meijer stores and were impressed with the business operations. However, member Randy Silasiri, who lives in Hunters Crossing, questioned the need for a large store to be open 24/7.

Silasiri also said he was unimpressed with design plans for the one-story supercenter, which call for two glass vestibules along the building front and in-laid brickwork. A 400-square-foot Meijer sign would be centered between the vestibules.

"This is not the best design we have seen," Silasiri said. "We need to see some more oomph in the building design."

The commission took no action on the company's requests but is scheduled to consider approving the permit and a certified survey map and making a recommendation on rezoning at its Aug. 28 meeting. The Village Board would then consider the rezoning request Sept. 4.

The village's Architectural Review Board will consider the project Aug. 23 and Sept. 13, if needed.

Meijer currently has no Wisconsin stores but announced plans to build a supercenter in Franklin, where that project is also in the approval process.