

Schmit Bros. expansion approved

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Ford dealership work to synch with Hwy. 33 reconstruction; project to be done for 100th anniversary

Timing is everything.

That was the rationale used by Schmit Bros. Ford co-owner Jim Schmit when he presented a proposal to the Saukville Plan Commission last week to refurbish and expand the auto dealership.

Schmit said the timing is ideal, because the state Department of Transportation is reconstructing Highway 33 in front of the dealership. He said the new building should also be completed in time for the 100th anniversary of the business in 2012.

Schmit outlined plans for a 10,000- square-foot expansion of the dealership at 925 E. Green Bay Rd. The work will involve demolishing the brick-clad north side of the building fronting Highway 33 and replacing it with a new showroom and offices.

The project will create a more customer friendly drive-through garage access to the service department. That feature will correct a logistical problem that has dogged the building since it was erected in 1975.

“With the current design of the service area, customers will be able to drive through and drop off their cars. The way it is now, they walk over to talk to someone in the service department just a few feet away from where a technician is using an impact wrench. It can be very difficult to hear,” Schmit said.

“We want to incorporate the new building design developed by Ford for its dealerships, and Ford’s philosophy that puts an emphasis on the public’s first impressions.”

The exterior of the building will be split stone, similar to the finish used on the adjacent Schmit Dodge.

Community Development Director Brian Biernat said the project will fit in well with the business overlay created for the village’s commercial district along Highway 33.

In conjunction with the road redesign, two driveways to the Ford dealership are being removed. In their place, an expanded driveway will be created between the Ford and Dodge dealerships.

The only issue village officials raised while reviewing the dealership’s plan was the extensive use of lights in the redesigned parking lot.

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Public Works Director Roy Wilhelm, a member of the Plan Commission, noted that neighboring property owners have long complained about the amount of lighting used at the dealership.

In response to that objection, Schmit said the plan calls for no additional lighting of the car lot.

Wilhelm said attention should be given to the amount of light at the perimeter of the property, something that can be controlled by directional fixtures.

"I think the lighting issue is something we can work out at the staff level. It shouldn't hold up the approval," Wilhelm said.

Enhancements to stormwater-handling features that are being done as part of the highway project have eliminated any concern the Department of Natural Resources has about drainage from the property, he said.

The commission unanimously approved the building and site changes requested by Schmit.

Final plans and financing details still need to be worked out, but he said he was certain the project would be completed in time for the dealership's anniversary in October 2012.