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Supermarket faces obstacle

pscale store Must get zoning approval. Forks Township site doesn't permit large retail stores.

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FORKS TWP. | A developers' plan to build a supermarket at Uhler Road and Sullivan Trail hinges on supervisors granting a zoning change on the property.

The township's planning commission voted 5-1 on Thursday to recommend supervisors consider a change.

Developer SamCar of Pittston, Pa., proposes a roughly 69,000 -square-foot supermarket with a possible 8,600 -square-foot expansion. Concept plans also show a parking lot with 386 spaces and gas station with about three islands.

SamCar would like to start work in late summer and finish sometime in 2007.

Rose Randazzo, an attorney for the developer, said six tenants have expressed interest in the property.

She described the project as a high-end grocery store including a cafe, fresh bread and organic foods section.

The project would stand on about 9 acres south of Uhler Road and east of Sullivan Trail in the employment center district.

While the zoning allows small retail stores, it forbids large retail stores such as a supermarket, zoning officer Tim Weis said earlier.

Supermarket-generated traffic is a key factor in considering a zoning change, said Planning Commission member Erik Chuss, who supports considering the move.

"If the traffic problem can be addressed, it may not be a bad idea," he said. "It's still early yet. We need to take it to the next step to find out if it's feasible or not."

Dean Turner, who cast the "no" vote, said he fears allowing the supermarket would open the door for more big-box stores in the district.

Concept plans show several vehicle entrances onto the supermarket property. A right -turn-only entrance and exit would provide access from Sullivan Trail, said project engineer Jeffrey Ott. Plans show an entrance off Ian Street and another off Braden Boulevard, a planned road connecting Sullivan Trail and Kesslerville Road. Trucks would enter the property from Uhler Road.

A study explored the traffic impact during peak driving hours. The supermarket would generate 164 new trips in the morning, 460 trips in the evening and 548 trips during peak hours on Saturday, said Rob Hoffman, a traffic consultant for the project.

The study suggests several road improvements. They include a traffic light at Braden Boulevard and Sullivan Trail and widening Sullivan Trail to include left-hand turn lanes at the intersection with Uhler Road.

A discussion touched on context of this study and how it relates to an expected increase in traffic from sources other than the supermarket. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation predicts a 2.2 percent growth in traffic each year. Solicitor Karl Kline said officials should consider whether development in the area will cause traffic to outpace PennDOT's expectations.

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