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Forks planners urge study of grocery plan

Proposal would have to clear zoning hurdle in the township.

By Joe Nixon
Of The Morning Call

The prospect of allowing a large, upscale supermarket to be built at Sullivan Trail and Uhler Road in Forks Township is worth further study, the township Planning Commission decided Thursday.

The planners voted 5-1, with Dean Turner dissenting, to recommend that township supervisors examine the prospect of allowing a nearly 69,000-square-foot store to be built on 9 acres in the Sullivan Trail Business Park at the southeast corner of Sullivan Trail and Uhler Road. Planning Commission Chairman Vito Tamborrino Jr. was absent.

The Planning Commission vote advocated investigating adding the supermarket use as a permitted use in the employment center zoning district where the proposed site is located. Current zoning there does not allow for a large grocery store.

"We're hopeful," said Rose Randazzo-Pizzuto, a partner in SamCar Group Ltd. of Pittston, Luzerne County. The issue now goes to township supervisors, who must also decide if the zoning adjustment should be pursued.

SamCar had originally proposed building a CVS drugstore on one of three lots in the business park, but later proposed the supermarket on a combination of the three tracts. Randazzo-Pizzuto said SamCar is talking with six potential "high-end grocers" for the proposed store. Forks has only one large grocery store, the Giant supermarket on Town Center Boulevard.

While numerous concerns were raised about potential traffic impacts, Turner said he was also concerned that making an exception for the supermarket would open the door for similar requests in the same zoning district.

The developers have said that if the township is not agreeable to the zoning change, it would go ahead with the drugstore.

Under the supermarket proposal, SamCar would partner with the developers of the nearby Forks Landing business park to install left-turn lanes on Sullivan Trail at the Uhler Road intersection and make traffic signal improvements. SamCar representatives said the supermarket would be served by a right-in, right-out entrance south of the intersection and a traffic light still farther south at Braden Boulevard, the main entrance to the business park, which will also feature a medical office building and a bank.

SamCar representatives said they would report back to the township with updated traffic figures that take a potential 8,600-square-foot store addition into account. Planning Commission members were worried about the traffic impact of the project on an already busy area. "It already backs up," said Planning Commission Vice Chairman Erik Chuss, adding he was also concerned about the impact on Tatamy and Stockertown.

Rob Hoffman of Traffic Planning and Design of Center Valley said the supermarket is expected to generate an extra 164 car trips on a weekday morning, 461 new trips on a weekday evening, and 548 on a typical Saturday at midday.

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