

Circle K coming to Whitfield Estates

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WHITFIELD ESTATES -- The former Cesar's Furniture Store in Whitfield Estates is set to be a 24-hour gas station, but a Circle K instead of a RaceTrac as once proposed.

Bonus Properties, a division of Sarasota-based Bank of Commerce, received preliminary site plan approval Thursday from the County Commission to build a Circle K gas station at the former furniture mart, 7259 N. Tamiami Trail, plus a 7,250-square-foot retail store on a separate parcel.

Commissioners Carol Whitmore and Robin DiSabatino voted against the project.

The property on the corner of U.S. 41 and Pearl Avenue was proposed for a RaceTrac gas station in 2009, but county commissioners voted 5-2 to reject the 24-pump gas station because it was not compatible with the neighborhood. Whitmore voted against that plan, too. Since then, RaceTrac opened a gas station on the corner of U.S. 41 and 53rd Avenue West.

The 4,400-square-foot Circle K will feature eight pumps with 16 fueling stations, a 22-foot-tall single story building, convenience store and a separate commercial space.

The developer agreed to limit the uses of the additional commercial space, eliminating the possibility of car repair shops and other loud automotive-related businesses, but a drive-thru operation like a bank or fast food restaurant could open in the space. The developer also agreed to prevent outdoor speakers from being installed at the rear of the buildings.

The applicant would have to come back with a plan to modify the commercial building parcel, county planner Shelley Hamilton said.

"We would have to look at it to see how much modification we would allow administratively," she said.

Whitmore said if a drive-thru comes she hopes it will fit in with the college community, offering the student population a Starbucks or Dunkin' Donuts.

The applicant also agreed to stipulations to prevent adult entertainment, massage parlors and pawn shops from opening in the retail space.

Despite the stipulations, the Whitfield-Ballentine Manor Association opposed the development because of traffic, noise and compatibility of the neighborhood, said association President Jeff Rainwater.

Residents have expressed concerns the neighboring 7-Eleven was denied gas pumps, but Hamilton said the site was too small to handle the traffic in the parking lot for a gas station.

Belinda Hicks, a manager at the 7-Eleven, is concerned she will go out of business or have to lay off employees because of the competition from the gasstation and larger convenience store.

"They'll all be cut back," she said.

Commissioner John Chappie had some reservations about traffic flow and cars stacking up on Pearl Avenue, blocking neighboring driveways.

"Are we trying to fit a gallon and a half of commercial activity in a one gallon area?" Chappie said.

Pearl Avenue will be restriped to add a center turning lane, according to staff, but commissioners Chappie and Whitmore wanted to add access on U.S. 41, but Florida Department of Transportation prefers to consolidate entrances. It is also possible the Pearl Avenue entrance could become a right in, right out to avoid stacking cars on Peal Avenue after additional staff review.

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Read more here: <http://www.brandon.com/2013/06/07/4557930/circle-k-coming-to-whitfield-estates.html#storylink=cpy>