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West Windsor Rite Aid proposal grinds ahead

By: Nick Norlen , Staff Writer

Site plan review yields compromise on access to site

WEST WINDSOR — After yet another version of the Rite Aid concept plan — nearly the 30th according to the developer — was presented at Monday at the West Windsor Planning Board's Site Plan Review Advisory Board meeting, a compromise was reached on the night's main sticking point: access points at Cranbury and Princeton-Hightstown roads.

Discussion between the board and the developer's representatives focused primarily on traffic configuration and parking lot layout at the site, which is bordered by Cranbury and Princeton-Hightstown roads and Carlton Place.

According to preliminary concept sketches, Rite Aid and Starbucks would bookend the site, with slots between being filled by a restaurant and a retail tenant.

Representing developer Richard Dreher, the principal managing partner of the project, attorney Gary Forshner introduced a "hybrid plan" that he said incorporated suggestions, including modification of the parking lot layout, landscaping and architecture, from township professionals and zoning board members.

Project traffic consultant Dan Disario said "the zoning board was pretty specific in its approval that it wanted to lock down the access points, but deferred to this group in terms of discussing specific movements allowed at each of those access points."

Township traffic consultant Guy Olsen said that although the many access points provided flexibility, they also posed some problems.

"Unfortunately, PNC (Bank) came in first and we gave them the left turn-in (lane)," he said, referring to the potential conflict with the proposed entrance on Princeton-Hightstown Road.

Board members said the site entrances could pose safety risks.

"This looks like an accident waiting to happen," said the advisory's board's vice chairman, Ted Begun.

After lengthy discussion, the board agreed that the best scenario would be a "right-in only" on Cranbury Road, a "left-in only" on Princeton-Hightstown Road, and full access on Carlton Place.

"We might be able to live with that," said Mr. Forshner.

Also discussed during the meeting were changes in parking lot layout and landscape and architectural design.

The parking lot would allow 92 spaces, with an additional eight spaces on Carlton Place.

Outdoor seating is planned for both Starbucks and the restaurant.

Project engineering consultant Bill Bertino said the "big feature" added to the plan since the last meeting was the moving of the Rite Aid store.

"What that effectively did was provide a mass of retail building wall right up against the roadway, which is consistent of your new overlay zonage," he said, referring to the recently passed Princeton Junction Overlay District ordinance.

Mr. Bertino said fully engineered plans will come later.

"What we want to come away with here is a conceptual plan that everyone is comfortable with," he said. "I can't imagine we're not pretty darn close to what this plan should look like."

Mr. Begun said the next step is for the developers to return to the board with another revision.

After that, it will move back to the zoning board, he said, noting that he is pleased with the compromises reached.

"This is a very good example of the developer working with the township and with the township boards to make it better," he said. "They flipped the whole design."