

Shopping center nearer to reality

By Marie Chostney
staff writer

Most of the obstacles to building a shopping center in the Eight Mile-Farmington area appear to have fallen.

On April 6, the Livonia City Council will vote whether to override the planning commission's recommendation and approve the 118,000-square-foot Northridge Commons Shopping Center on the south side of Eight Mile between Farmington and Gill.

In December, the commission, citing traffic concerns on Eight Mile, turned down the project.

At a council committee meeting Wednesday, Jane Comstock, spokeswoman for area residents, said the developer, Nelson/Ross Companies of Farmington Hills, has gone the extra mile in solving traffic problems and easing the concerns of residents who live near the center.

"They've been anxious to please us," Comstock said. "We would have to see it turned down now and something less so in there."

Council members Ron Oehala, Dale Jurcisin and Laura Toy raised two new issues at Wednesday's meeting. Considering vacant supermarket buildings now in the city, all three asked whether it is wise to build another supermarket in Livonia. The shopping center includes a 47,000-square-foot supermarket drug store combination.

"That's what freedom of the marketplace is all about," said Nelson/Ross spokesman David Nelson. He also said there is no other grocery store on Eight Mile between Haggerty Road and the Redford border.

Comstock said she talked to area residents after the meeting, and they "welcome the supermarket."

"We were a little surprised they raised the question. But I can understand council's concerns," she said. "They have to look at Livonia as a whole and ask, 'How many grocery

stores can Livonia absorb?' Council is looking at the instability indicated in the economy. They're looking at the overall picture."

Toy also wanted assurance that Nelson/Ross would put a "proper mix" of tenants in the center so that their products and services wouldn't overlap.

TALKS BETWEEN the developer, the city, residents and Wayne and Oakland counties have led to the following commitments:

- Nelson/Ross will foot the bill for the engineering work needed to improve and widen Eight Mile from Farmington Road to about one-quarter mile past Gill Road.

- Wayne County and Livonia will pay for a traffic light at Eight Mile and Gill roads.

- Nelson/Ross will build a wall around the shopping center higher than five feet.

- Shopping center lights will be directed inward, not outward, to shield residents from their glare.

- More trees will be planted for additional landscaping.

"We have met every requirement that you have asked for," Nelson told the council Wednesday.

In a March 23 letter to the council, the Farmington Downtown Development Authority withdrew its objection to the shopping center. The DDA believed the center could hinder efforts to rejuvenate Farmington's nearby downtown area. The project site is less than two miles from downtown Farmington.

In her letter, DDA executive director Wendy Strip Sittsamer said the DDA had since discovered a court order requires commercial development on the site.

Back in the late 1970s, a developer took the city to court when the city wouldn't approve a major mall for the site. The court, in a consent judgment, ruled that the portion of the land now owned by Nelson/Ross must be developed for commercial use.

Hills to monitor cleanup

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills officials want manufactured housing builder Howard Keating to continue clearing up problems with ditching, roads, drainage and grading in the Nine Mile-Middlebelt area.

The immediate hold on permits for new Keating houses in Farmington Hills, and further inspections on existing houses, should not interfere with the city council's request that he clear up problems that prompted nearby residents to complain, assistant city manager David Call said.

"We have not told him he can't work," Call said. "We want him to

continue to work so he can clean up."

KEATING COMMUNITY Homes has two new, unoccupied, manufactured houses on Karen Place at Nine Mile and five expected on Elm Grove, north of Nine Mile.

A report is expected to be issued to the city council April 11 documenting Keating's progress on cleaning up his work sites. The council can make a decision on whether to continue the restrictions or drop them, Call said.

"It would be up to him (Keating) to prove to the city council so they are comfortable he will take action in the future to prevent problems," he said.

City staff is scheduled to inspect his houses next week to determine Keating's progress in cleanup. Call said city staff also will be checking other builders' houses in the area.

"Who's to say they (other builders) aren't causing problems. He (Keating) is being brought to the forefront because of his houses on Karen Place. This was directed at Keating because he's the one who got complaints," Call said.

THE CITY council last week put a hold on new building permits and restricted inspections for Keating's existing homes, following a barrage of complaints from residents in the Nine Mile-Middlebelt area. Residents and city officials complained of problems with turn-up

roads, blocked drainage ditches and roads blocked by construction equipment. Keating also is charged with violating noise ordinances as well as after-hours and Sunday construction ordinances.

Keating denied all complaints. Following the council's action last week, Keating said from his Bloomfield Hills office that he was upset that restrictions were placed on him when there are other builders in the area.

"Other than normal construction what have I done wrong?" Keating asked.

He said that as far as mud and road problems, "I can't help that. We've gone out there and corrected problems."

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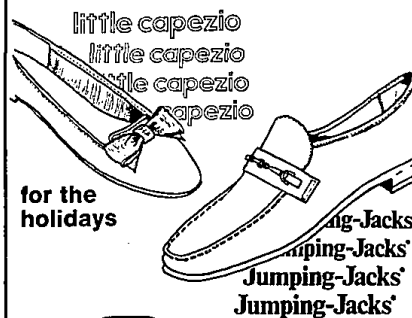
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