



Solon sacks fast-food proposal

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Thomas Jewell, Sun News

SOLON After more than four hours of talking about a new McDonald's restaurant at one of the town's busiest intersections, City Council ultimately decided it wasn't lovin' it.

Mercifully or not, council decided shortly after Monday's meeting stretched on past midnight that concerns over traffic and parking at the former Sunoco lot at SOM Center and Aurora roads outweighed the benefits of tabling the measure for another two weeks.

McDonald's representatives have already gone to extreme lengths to try to make the site work. The only remaining possibility seemed to be formal negotiations with the owner of adjacent property that could provide a solution to ease potential traffic congestion.

"In this situation, I really feel the only difference that can be made involves the people who own the access site," Mayor Susan Drucker said late in the meeting, accusing the property owners of the Solar Center of not coming to the table, choosing instead to "purposely obstruct development of another property."

Of course, Caplan Perlick Ltd., owns a lot more property across the street, where a development agreement to rebuild the existing Giant Eagle remains "on life support," having been granted numerous extensions since voters granted a zoning change more than a year ago, Planning Director Rob Frankland said.

Councilman Ed Kraus, who favored tabling the McDonald's proposal as the clock struck midnight, said he'd asked one of the principals to come to Monday's meeting, a written request that was not accepted.

"Our goal is not to make a bad situation worse," Kraus said prior to the vote. "We should be looking at how to solve the traffic problem, not exacerbate it."

Law Director Thomas Lobe pointed out the city had "started on this trek" with McDonald's as far back as April 2009, when the Sunoco property became vacant. What followed were three planning commission meetings, one safety committee meeting and two council meetings, culminating with the Monday night marathon.

Citing Solon code which requires council action within three readings on planning commission matters — *or* the matter automatically passes — Lobe said "we have to have a legal conclusion," although he noted blog.cleveland.com/.../print.html?entry...

tabling the matter until the Dec. 20 City Council meeting was a possibility on the “procedural landscape.”

But Councilwoman Toni Richmond, who had registered strong objections to the proposal as council’s representative on the Planning Commission, pointed out it was going to take more than two weeks to turn the pumpkin back into a coach.

“There has been no verbal indication from the (access site owners) that they would be willing to do this,” Richmond said. “And even if we get it, it will take longer than that (to hash out an agreement). I don’t see that happening.”

Although the owners of the corner lot, Visconsi Properties, offered to put in an extra right-hand turn lane from eastbound Aurora onto northbound SOM Center, Richmond saw a “traffic nightmare” looming for southbound traffic on SOM, when customers attempted a left-turn into McDonald’s.

And even with the prospect of an access road to alleviate curb cuts on Aurora Road, it still wasn’t enough to convince Councilman Bill Mooney.

“We’ve already had hours and hours of discussion on this and an access road doesn’t change my view,” Mooney said, after conducting an informal survey of outlying McDonald’s franchises and finding none with as few as three dozen or so parking spaces.

The current McDonald’s, further east on Aurora Road, has about 60 parking spaces, but no drive-through. The local franchise owner, Melony Karos, is proposing a side-by-side drive-through, which she said would eliminate the need for more than 36-38 parking spaces.

“The fact is, there’s a 43-space parking variance,” said Councilman Robert Pelunis.

Karos projected as many as 80 percent of the customers using the new drive-through. She estimated a total of 1,250 customers a day.

But Councilman Rick Bell asked that a “typical McDonald’s design layout, pulled by a citizen from the company’s own website,” be incorporated into the record by Lobe, along with McDonald’s two dozen or so exhibits.

“That typical site layout shows 70 parking spaces, and that’s with two drive-throughs,” Bell said, arguing the proposal — in any of the four site plans presented to the city at one time or another — was a case of “overbuilding” on the property at hand.

More than two dozen people remained on hand for the duration of the 4½-hour discussion, about one-third of them from McDonald’s.

Roughly 12 of the 18 variances sought by McDonald’s were ultimately passed by city council, although the two main ones — the 43-space parking variance and the overall site plan — were not.

After the meeting, attorney Bruce Rinker, who represented McDonald's throughout the proceedings, said he hoped to "regroup" on the proposal.

"We're exhausted tonight," Rinker said in the lobby as council picked up with the rest of its agenda. "I'm going to talk to my client and see what the options are. We still want to work with the city."

Asked about her plans and the possibility of shopping for another location, Karos said "we're still working with the city to get this site approved."

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