

# McDonald's receives OK for bulk of variances

By SUE REID

In divided decisions, a site plan for a new McDonald's restaurant and most of the 20-plus zoning variances requested for the project were approved last week by the Solon planning commission.

Only three variances, dealing with green space, impervious surface area and aisle width, were denied.

Mayor Susan A. Drucker, a member of the commission, voted in favor of the site plan and all of the variances. "We've gotten over one hurdle with this subject matter," she said.

Joining Mrs. Drucker in

approving the site plan were commission members Roger C. Newberry and Nancy Meany. Opposing the site plan and almost all of the variances were commission members William M. Mazur and Councilwoman Toni M. Richmond.

"I just could not support area variances for a business at this location," Mr. Mazur said of the site at the northeast corner of SOM Center (Route 91) and Aurora (Route 43) roads. "I think the main thing is the number of variances. Even though McDonald's and their architect and group tried to

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# McDonald's receives

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reduce them, it was still a large number of variances for a small piece of property," he said.

"Squeezing a high-volume business in that location did not sit well with me," Mr. Mazur said. "I think it's going to be a traffic nightmare."

Ms. Richmond said she has two "grave concerns" about the project. "I think the project is too big for that site," she said of the approximately 4,000-square-foot building on a 0.93-acre lot. "When you have to ask for that many variances, it's too much."

In addition, she said, the fast-food restaurant will create a "traffic nightmare for residents" in that location.

"Despite the fact that it's going to be very difficult to get out of the project and head south on SOM, people are going to do it anyway, and they are going to block traffic without any regard for doing so," Ms. Richmond said. "The only thing that will be easy to do is get in the restaurant from 43 or get out of the restaurant from 43 if you want to head north." For the rest of the directions, "there's just too many lanes of traffic you have to cross, and there are going to be accidents," she said.

Of particular concern, Ms. Richmond said, is that McDonald's primarily serves young people. "I'm just afraid that teenagers are going to get hurt going in and out of that place."

She also said she has heard from her constituents that they don't want the restaurant in that location. "They don't want another fast-food restaurant, and they don't like the traffic concerns," she said.

"From my perspective, I can't stop another fast-food restaurant. Obviously, it's an appropriate establishment for the zoning there. I'm not objecting to the use of that property, just object to the fact that the site is not big enough to accommodate that project."

Mr. Newberry, who expressed opposition to the plan early on, said he had a change of heart. "I came to the conclusion that the variances they are asking for are not related to health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Solon but are more of an impact on McDonald's business than they are on us," he said. "If it becomes difficult to turn left onto SOM, people just won't do it. That will be a commercial issue for them."

Prior to the vote, which included a 43-

space parking variance, commission members heard testimony from two people with traffic backgrounds.

Kevin Westbrook, the city's traffic engineer, and Michael Hobbs, lead traffic expert for GPD Group on behalf of McDonald's, acknowledged that it will be difficult getting in and out of the site. But both said parking should be adequate for the site.

They are relying on people using good judgment, Mr. Westbrook said.

Mr. Hobbs used calculations based on the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and Mr. Westbrook compared similar sites. Mr. Hobbs also presented statistics on how much business will be done at the double drive-through.

"If all that is true, they should be OK," Mr. Westbrook said.

"I think the primary factor for the commission was the input and testimony of the city's traffic engineer, who felt that the access points were not an issue that required the denial of the plan," Solon Planning Director Robert S. Frankland said. "I think that was probably the deciding factor for the people who voted for the plan."

The site plan shows the Aurora Road access in the middle of the lot, instead of at the extreme east end of the lot, Mr. Frankland said, which was more or less the initial site plan submitted by McDonald's. The plan would include full access on SOM Center Road, based on the recommendation from Mr. Westbrook, and right turns only in and out on Aurora Road.

Following the meeting, attorney Bruce Rinker, land-use counsel for McDonald's, said, "We appreciate the approvals."

"We respect the fact that it's been a challenging proposal before them, and they were very diligent to take the time to study it thoroughly," he said of the planning commission. "I felt the nature of the vote all reflects that."

Mr. Frankland said last week's vote represents the commission's final action on the issue. "It has gone to City Council, and, unless council were to refer it back to the planning commission, they are done with their review," he said.

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# 'Find another location,' resident tells restaurant

By SUE REID

Prior to the Solon planning commission's discussion last week of a proposed new McDonald's restaurant, one resident appealed for reconsideration of the project.

Peter Ormond said that the fast-food restaurant proposed for the northeast corner of SOM Center (Route 91) and Aurora (Route 43) roads will "create colossal traffic and safety issues that will be ongoing.

"I beseech you to not give your approval." He said the project is like trying to fit a size 12 foot into a size 9 shoe.

In addition, Mr. Ormond said, no practical difficulty exists to justify the requested zoning variances. "They have created their own practical difficulty by trying to build a facility that is far too large for the amount of space available," he said.

The proposed restaurant is about 4,000 square feet on a 0.93-acre parcel.

"They simply need to find another location or reduce the size of their project so that all of these variances are not required," Mr. Ormond said. "Allowing an operation of this size to squeeze itself into this tight of a location will create safety and traffic problems that are devastating."

Mr. Ormond said it was his understanding that, in McDonald's application for the variances, it was stated that the project had 18 months of prior review. He said, when taxpayer dollars

are being used, it should have been subject for the public's view early in the process.

Attorney Bruce Rinker, land-use counsel for McDonald's, said the restaurant approached the city 1 1/2 years ago with an initial inquiry. From then, it began private negotiations to acquire or lease the property from its owner, Visconsi Solon Land Co. "That has been the discussion that has been going on for a year and a half," he said.

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# Residents not happy about happy meal plan

By SUE REID

Although Solon City Council held off discussion Monday on a proposed new McDonald's restaurant for the northeast corner of SOM Center (Route 91) and Aurora (Route 43) roads, residents spoke loud and clear on the issue.

Council tabled the planning commission's referral of over 20 zoning variances and a site plan for the restaurant until it has full attendance at its next meeting. Councilman William I. Russo was absent and requested that the matter be held. In addition, three variances that were denied by the planning commission are due to be appealed at that time.

"What in the heck happened to the plan for the corridor of town?" resident Dennis L. Tidmore asked. "What happened to this grand scheme for (Routes 91 and 43?"

"McDonald's doesn't cut it," he said. "Is that what we want our town or city to be remembered or looked at as — a pass-through or drive-through?"

"McDonald's is not the answer to an attractive center of town," Councilman Edward H. Kraus said.

Resident George Hoffman told council members that, if they grant approval to the project, "the integrity of our zoning is shot." Other projects will go before the city with lesser variance requests and will cite the fact that McDonald's was approved, he said.

"Once this is a done deal, it becomes a burden on the entire community," resident Richard Zimmerman said.

"You are putting an intensive high-use facility on a sensitive corner," he said. "The city can't deny a permitted use, but no city is bound to allow excessive uses."

Mr. Hoffman asked that council use "common sense" when making its decision. "Why would McDonald's want to put the community and its customers at such high risk at this location?" he asked. "How can that area accommodate more traffic?"

"You are not giving enough emphasis to very legitimate safety issues on this site," resident Ryan Mystowski said. They are significant variance requests, he said, especially in the area of parking.

"It seems as though they are flying through the process and close to setting up shop," Mr. Mystowski said of McDonald's.

The combination of the city's busiest intersection and one of the world's

busiest franchises should call for a second look, he said.

Mr. Mystowski noted that Mayor Susan A. Drucker has mentioned that the city has to do what's fair to McDonald's. "The higher priority should be what's good for the people," he said.

Mr. Zimmerman said the 43-space parking variance would have a ripple effect on other area businesses and on the roads. "If people can't find parking, they will impact other lots," he said.

McDonald's is a great franchise, and he would love to see it relocate, Mr. Zimmerman said, "but I just don't think this is the location to be considered."

Gregg Courtemanche, district supervisor for Burger King, said, whatever council does, in order to make the best decision, some sort of traffic study for the area is needed.

He said the Solon Burger King nearby on Aurora Road has 600 to 650 vehicles go through in a day. "You can pretty much count on doubling that with McDonald's," Mr. Courtemanche said.

"I'm not trying to stop it," he said, "but this needs to be in a different place for everyone's benefit, including McDonald's."

Resident Jacquelyn Calavitta said residents are not opposed to McDonald's expanding and getting the benefits of that expansion, but the area proposed is a "big problem."

The amount and percentages of variances tell the story, she said. "If that doesn't tell the story," she said of parking and setback variances requested, "then I don't know what does."

Ms. Calavitta asked council members how many cars travel that area on a daily basis. She provided them with the figure she obtained from the Cuyahoga County Engineer's Office of 43,000 cars per day. "If this is the way we make decisions without the most basic facts, then God help us all," she said.

Resident David Consolo said, "I beseech you to think twice about this. Accidents will happen in this area."

Mrs. Drucker said Tuesday that she had follow-up discussions with Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. Consolo after the meeting, and "both came across with some extremely valid points." She said she appreciated the fact that they not only spoke out on the issue but offered possible solutions.

Mr. Zimmerman "made several suggestions to me this morning, and I will take those to McDonald's," she said. "I really appreciate input like that." ↴