

Planners Against Ni Village Proposal

Spotsylvania Planning Commission

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BY AMY FLOWERS UMBLE

A proposed mixed-use community in Massaponax could bring high-tech jobs to Spotsylvania County. It could put thousands more cars on nearby roads every day. And last night, Spotsylvania's Planning Commission voted to recommend denial of a rezoning request for Ni Village.

"I think this project is going to tie up [U.S.] 1 quite a bit, and with that, I can't support it," James Strother said.

Luck Development Partners asked for the rezoning, to build a community offering a mix of commercial, residential, retail and educational uses.

The 333 acres could include condos, shops, offices, college classrooms, pedestrian trails and a public square. But last night's meeting focused less on those 333 acres and more on the highway running through the proposed project. Ni Village would straddle U.S. 1 near Massaponax High School. The commission held its first public hearing on the proposal on Aug. 3.

Then, speakers and commission members expressed concerns over traffic in the area--and, most especially, over the safety of pedestrians who would cross the highway to use the planned shops, trails and classrooms.

Last night, Luck Development Partners brought back amended proffers addressing some of those concerns. Developers agreed to pay more money toward improving the intersection of U.S. 1 and Hickory Ridge Road.

Residents of that road have been especially worried about the traffic such a development would bring. But developers also offered less than originally preferred to improve another nearby intersection, between the highway and Guinea Station Road.

But most of last night's conversation focused on the pedestrians.

"That's really the question: How would folks get across [U.S.] 1?" asked Andrew Condlin, who spoke for Luck Development Partners.

A walking bridge over the highway would end up being 771 feet long, Condlin said, more than triple the length of simply crossing the street. Plus, he said, studies showed pedestrians would skip the bridge and take their chances crossing U.S. 1. So the developers decided instead to offer eight improvements to a crosswalk spanning the width of U.S. 1.

Those improvements include animated crossing lights, restricting right turns on red lights, an 8-foot median and pedestrian crossing signs.

But Strother felt that no improvement could make the crosswalk a good idea.

"Stopping traffic for people to cross the road, I think that's going to be a real setback for Spotsylvania County," he said.

The commission voted down the rezoning, 4-3. Mary Lee Carter, Cliff Vaughan and Richard Sorrell voted in favor of the project.

"I think the project has an awful lot of potential to generate revenue for this county," Vaughan said.

The Luck Development application for the rezoning now goes to the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors.

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