

Development Of 'Village Bath Club' Property On May 29 Town Board Agenda

Written by Pat Grace: pgrace@antonnews.com Manhasset Press May 24, 2012

Community encouraged to give their opinion to the board

Over the years, the unsightly, denuded Village Bath property has been both ignored, and been in play. Unattractive as it is, it has become part of the familiar landscape and any change is suspect.

The Gate LLC, owner of the 1900 Northern Boulevard commercial retail space that includes Daffy's and the Apple Store on the corner, had considered purchasing the property, applied for a change of zoning from Residential A to Parking in mid-2011, and withdrew its proposal in the face of unanimous opposition by the neighboring communities.

Since that time the owner has made concessions in the design to appease the neighboring communities, specifically the Strathmore Village Civic Association (SVCA) and the South Strathmore Civic Association (SSCA).

The Gate LLC additionally applied for an expansion of the 1900 Northern Boulevard commercial building, a request that was within the existing zoning requirements and therefore needed no additional variance from the town. Construction has begun and The Gate LLC resubmitted its application for the change of zone from residential to parking.

"The Gate" topic was Number 3 on the town board agenda May 8 and was shouted down by those with property near the proposed development site. Several days prior to the town board meeting it was believed the civic associations, for the most part, had accepted the proposal halfheartedly believing it was, perhaps, the best offer they would get. At the meeting several still expressed they wanted closure and believed the expanded, landscaped parking lot was acceptable use of the property.

The Gate spokesperson has stated that their plan provides parking places in excess of town requirements, the surface water drainage system proposed is in excess of what is required, they will not increase the gross floor space beyond what is permitted, and they will provide plantings, buffers and trees all in excess of what is required. Additionally, it was said, approval of the plan would be contingent on restrictive covenants that had been requested by neighboring homeowners, including no structure be built on the site in the future. At the meeting some did question the enforcement of restrictive covenants.

Those are key elements in discussions between civic groups and the developer—the buffer zone with adjacent homeowners, the potential of future expansion of commercial space, enforcement of restrictive covenants and traffic and safety issues.

At the May 8 meeting one of the first speakers, and one of the few proponents of the proposed plan, said she was involved in transportation engineering and their point of view would be to look at what would be a traffic generator. She said she believes the design is proactive, that it is a good solid plan that will help traffic in the future. Another resident complained he spent almost \$2 million for his home, pays over \$25,000 in annual taxes and will have the view of a parking lot.

Others spoke against the plan citing both general and personal concerns: property devaluations; noisy car alarms; air pollution; increased crime; snow removal in winter will begin at 4 a.m.; garbage spillover from the parking lot onto their properties and security cars with yellow flashing lights—to name a few.

What everyone agreed upon was the traffic problems at The Gate—which is also the name of the road leading into the parking area after making a right turn at the traffic light on Northern Boulevard then driving past the Apple store. Residents said at peak traffic times they must sit through two traffic lights just to exit their community.

What was not agreed upon was that more parking spaces would create more traffic. Some believed it would alleviate traffic because there would be less need to cross over The Gate from the parking lot behind Daffy's/Apple when it was at capacity.

Additional traffic concerns were mentioned. Cars now barrel through the community, they complained, with no concern for the safety of neighborhood children, sometimes entering at Harrow Lane and Searingtown Road to reach

the parking lots. An unintended consequence, it was later pointed out, of the red light cameras installed at the intersection of Northern Boulevard and Port Washington/ Searingtown Road is that motorists bypass that light by turning onto Harrow Lane and traveling through Strathmore Village.

There were complaints that the few should not speak for the many referring to civic leaders that took a stand in favor of the development of the parking lot. Some members of the two civic groups closest to the proposed development believe they have been misrepresented by their civic leaders and want that known by the broader public. A case could also be made for the opposite, as those neighboring the proposed parking lot are, overall, a smaller percentage of the town.

The town board postponed making a decision on “The Gate” proposal at the May 8 meeting in order to be informed by as many community members as possible, enabling them to make the best possible decision. Supervisor Kaiman stressed that the board does value community input, and those board members not familiar with the area actually count on hearing the opinions of the entire community.

The next town board convenes May 29 but if you cannot attend, the board is accepting emails and letters from those personally affected and from the broader community until May 29.

Tell them what you think.