

Developer offers to go beyond requirements

Road improvements for project at N.C. 66 aimed at easing traffic worries

By Wesley Young

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WALKERTOWN

The man who wants to put a McDonald's and Walgreens at a busy corner says he is offering extensive road improvements in an effort to deal with traffic concerns raised by residents.

Michael Kelley, a partner with Kelley-Austin Properties, said he would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars beyond the amount required by the N.C. Department of Transportation for road improvements to N.C. 66

Whether it will be enough to persuade the Walkertown Town Council remains to be seen. The town's planning board has recommended that the council reject Kelley-Austin's request.

The project would put the two businesses at the southwest corner of N.C. 66 and U.S. 158 across from Sheetz Inc.'s convenience store and Walkertown Commons Shopping Center.

Kelley held a meeting last week so that residents could learn about the project and discuss their concerns.

"I think the biggest thing we tried to accomplish was to educate the people about what the project was all about," Kelley said later. "The biggest fear factor is traffic."

Kelley's project diagrams show road improvements that he said would cost about \$325,000, all required by the DOT, which controls the roads at the intersection.

Kelley said he is going beyond those requirements by extending a middle turn lane all the way from the intersection to the proposed Whitehall Village subdivision on N.C. 66. Kelley said that would cost an additional \$400,000.

He estimates that the McDonald's restaurant and Walgreens will represent a \$10 million investment.

"The two entities will employ a bunch of folks, and (there will be) roadwork that wouldn't be done by anybody who would develop that piece of property," Kelley said. "It is a deal that we like a lot. We like Walkertown a lot.

"It is like every project we have done," he said. "You have to inform the folks and hope they will make a decision that will be of benefit to everybody."

A raised concrete median splits U.S. 158 at the corner. To provide access to the site for eastbound traffic, drivers would be allowed to make a U-turn and travel west a short distance to turn into the property.

Some residents said they don't like that solution - or the corner lot's proposed back entrance off Martin Street, which is a neighborhood.

Chuck Anas of Walkertown, who looked at the plans, said that eastbound drivers who know the area will avoid the U-turn by turning left onto Darrow Road, then right onto Martin Street to drive through a residential neighborhood and get to the businesses.

Another resident, LeAura Alderson, said she was concerned about the traffic on N.C. 66. It is bad now, and she asked how much worse it might get.

"Our main concern is that we use that road every day, and you have to build in about 10 or 15 minutes" because of traffic at the intersection, she said.

D.J. and Terri Britt, who would own the McDonald's franchise, came to the meeting to meet residents.

"It is an area that we have been scouting for five years," D.J. Britt said, pointing to the spot's location on routes to Winston-Salem and Kernersville.

Marilyn Martin, a planning-board member, said she was skeptical about the developer's promise to keep trucks off Martin Street. The town doesn't have a police department, she said, so enforcement would be a problem.

Harold Warner, another resident, said that when Whitehall Village is built, drivers may use back streets to get to the corner without having to battle traffic on the main roads.

Kelley said that his company would bring the project to the council Feb. 21.

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