

Objections to Brimbal Ave. plaza continue

BY PAUL LEIGHTON STAFF WRITER | Posted: Wednesday, January 21, 2015 11:20 pm

BEVERLY — After three hours of listening to public opinion about a proposed shopping plaza on Brimbal Avenue, the Planning Board has yet to hear anything but a resounding “no.”

Residents continued to voice their displeasure with the project Wednesday night in a meeting attended by about 100 people at the Senior Center.

Speaker after speaker said the proposal — a 66,000-square-foot plaza anchored by a Whole Foods Market — would cause nightmarish traffic problems on an already busy roadway.

“This is a recipe for sheer gridlock for this area,” Herrick Street Extension resident Jim Kurtzke said.

The plaza, to be called North Shore Crossing, needs a special permit from the Planning Board to be built. For the second time in two weeks, the board listened as dozens of residents spoke against it.

The board had not taken a vote as of The Salem News’ deadline. Chairman John Thomson said it was planning to continue the public hearing until its next meeting on Feb. 10.

Residents pleaded with board members to take their concerns into consideration. Palmer Road resident Judy Martin, citing the developer’s own traffic study, said the plaza will add 30,000 vehicle trips per week to the area. Martin said that fits the definition of “undue” traffic, one of the conditions by which the board could deny a special permit.

“There will be overwhelming new traffic,” she said.

Developer Steven Cohen of CEA Group did not dispute the 30,000 number but said it is not a fair way to evaluate the traffic impact of the shopping plaza.

Cohen said experts agree that the best way to gauge traffic impact is by looking at the increase in vehicle trips during peak hours. By those measures, he said, “It works out to very small, modest numbers.”

“The impact on the neighborhood will be small,” he said.

Cohen said the total daily volume of traffic will increase by about 5 1/2 percent due to the plaza, “and that’s using very, very conservative assumptions.”



North Shore Crossing: Whole Foods entrance

Artist rendering Whole Foods Market is scheduled to be included in a proposed shopping plaza on Brimbal Avenue in Beverly.

For the most part, residents who spoke at the meeting had no use for Cohen's interpretation of the numbers. Nelson Avenue resident Vicki Cozzolino said putting a busy shopping plaza on Brimbal Avenue will turn it into "another Route 1A."

"It's not safe for the kids," she said. "You need to really think about who's living in that area."

Putnam Street resident Bill Soares said residents on the side streets off Brimbal Avenue already try to stop people from using their streets as shortcuts.

"We're hemmed in," he said. "If you hem in the other side of Brimbal Avenue, we're done. We're cooked."

Brimbal Avenue resident Matteu Kelsch said the plaza will lead to a drop in real estate values of the homes in the area, another considering of the Planning Board in granting a special permit. He said it already takes him three to five minutes to get out of his driveway in the morning.

"I can assure you that a Whole Foods will not be increasing the value of my property," he said.

Residents also questioned why the Planning Board should vote on the project before Cohen receives permission from the state to have driveways for the plaza on Sohier Road and the connector road.

The plaza, if it is approved, would not be built until after the city completes a \$5 million project designed to improve traffic flow in the area. That project, which is scheduled to start in the spring, includes building roundabouts at both ends of the connector road and widening a portion of Brimbal Avenue.

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