

Manatee County OKs hotel, cinema and shops near Ellenton mall

By Dale White
Staff Writer

Posted at 3:19 PM

Updated at 7:55 PM

One commissioner votes no, citing traffic problems

ELLENTON — Although it acknowledged traffic congestion in the area, the Manatee County Commission on Thursday voted 5-1 to approve a movie theater and hotel near the Ellenton Premium Outlets mall.

Commissioner Priscilla Whisenant Trace, whose district includes the site, cast the dissenting vote. Commissioner Reggie Bellamy was absent.

“I would love to have a movie theater there,” Trace said. Yet she noted that the retail hub northeast of the Interstate 75 and U.S. 301 interchange has “poorly designed access roads. ... Any way you look at it, they don’t work. ... This time of year, it’s terrible. The rest of the year it’s bad.”

Commissioner Carol Whitmore said many young adults moving into the North County area want a movie theater and that the closest one is in Bradenton. She compared traffic near the mall with the congestion that occurs on another popular destination that attracts people from other communities: Anna Maria Island, where she resides. Islanders cope with heavier traffic during the tourist season, she said.

Darenda Marvin, a land use planner with the Grimes Goebel law firm, represented hotelier Jiten Patel, the new owner of the 7.3 acres at the northwest corner of 60th Avenue East and Factory Shops Boulevard. Patel operates a Holiday Inn near the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport.

Marvin said the county is planning \$10.5 million in road improvements in the vicinity to be paid with gas taxes, sales taxes and impact fees.

Clarke Davis, the county's transportation planning manager, said those improvements include widening 60th Avenue between Factory Shops Boulevard and U.S. 301 to six lanes and adding turn lanes, or possibly a roundabout, at Factory Shops Boulevard and 60th Avenue.

He noted that the Florida Department of Transportation also intends to add capacity at the nearby interchange of U.S. 301 and I-75 by converting it from a partial cloverleaf to a diamond interchange with "longer, wider ramps."

Andy Branco, who resides near 60th Avenue East, objected to the possibility of a roundabout. "Trust me. They don't work."

Branco also stressed that "the movie theater is in the wrong place. ... You are creating a traffic hazard."

In January 2017 the commission approved OM Cinemas' plans for an 11-screen, 34,000-square-foot movie theater and 22,800 square feet of retail on the property, which is now used as a palm tree nursery.

Yet the cinema company was unable to close on the property, Marvin said.

Patel acquired the site and altered the plans to include a possible combination of a 50,000-square-foot movie theater, a 330-room hotel and 120,000 square feet of commercial uses.

Commissioners noted that hotel guests will be able to walk to the mall, a hockey arena, restaurants and other retail.

"This is exactly where we want this type of development," Commissioner Misty Servia said.

Marvin said Patel has yet to partner with a theater operator and has not determined how many screens may be in the cinema.