

Wal-Mart's plans draw residents' ire

Opponents say the proposed Supercenter site sits in the middle of neighborhoods that include school bus stops.

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TEMPLE TERRACE - Vivian Bly lives along a narrow stretch of Harney Road.

"We're usually the ones that get woken up in the middle of the night from accidents," she told a Hillsborough County hearing master Monday. "I'm usually the one who has to call 911."

For this rezoning hearing, about a proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter, Bly came with photographs of the "dead man's curve."

Testimony from Wal-Mart representatives and Temple Terrace residents including Bly lasted past midnight.

The hearing master has 15 business days from the close of the meeting to submit a written recommendation to the Hillsborough County Commission. The commission is scheduled to vote to approve or deny Wal-Mart's rezoning request on Dec. 13.

The 216,000-square-foot Supercenter would sit on 34.37 acres that front both Temple Terrace Highway and Harney Road, west of U.S. 301.

Representatives for the retail giant brought their own pictures to the meeting. They attempted to show the hearing master that Wal-Mart's request to rezone the property for a retail commercial use fit with the landscape of the surrounding area.

An urban planner for the project showed photographs of a nearby lumber yard, a cell tower, a dairy farm, Tampa Electric substation and 200-foot-wide TECO transmission lines.

Project engineer Dave Campbell said Wal-Mart has gone out of its way to fit into the neighborhood and appease Temple Terrace residents, even though the store would sit outside the city's jurisdiction.

Wal-Mart would receive its water and sewer service from Temple Terrace.

Campbell said the store has agreed to have no truck deliveries between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

Instead of using 1,000-watt light fixtures outside, Wal-Mart would use 400-watt lights. And instead of the standard 39-foot-tall fixtures for such a project, the store would use 30-foot-tall fixtures.

An urban planner said that the land-use category Wal-Mart was in meant the company could develop up to 650,000 square feet. Instead, the retailer has planned to develop less than half that.

None of that mattered to the nearly 20 residents who spoke in opposition to the store. They brought hand-made renderings and photographs to show that the proposed project area sits in the middle of residential neighborhoods that include churches and school bus stops.

City Council member Glenda Venable said there are 17 school bus stops in the immediate area, where 400 students wait every day. The Supercenter would add more traffic and put children at risk on already crowded roads, she said.

"A big-box store just doesn't belong here," Venable said.

Ralph Bosek, Temple Terrace community redevelopment director, said the property for the proposed store is part of the city's future annexation plans. A store of that scale, he said, doesn't fit with the city's profile.

The county planning commission staff members agreed. In their report, they told the hearing master that the overall impact of Wal-Mart would "significantly change the character of the area."

Staff members said the Supercenter should be located closer to a major intersection.

But the county's planning and growth department recommended the project's approval, with certain conditions.

When county commissioners take up the issues in December, they will review all the testimony, documents and petitions submitted for this week's hearing.

Commissioners reserve the option to vote for the project without hearing any additional arguments. If they do ask for additional testimony, only people who spoke at Monday's hearing can address the board.