



Wawa gets Vineland OK for store on W. Landis Ave., near Rt. 55

Joseph P. Smith, The Daily Journal
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VINELAND – Wawa Inc. is cleared to build a new version of its superstore at West Landis Avenue and South Mill Road and begin tapping the increasing heavy traffic getting off Route 55 for destinations in Vineland.

The new store prototype won't end up looking or operating exactly as Wawa envisioned, thanks to modifications city planning officials pressed on the retail chain on Wednesday night.

The differences include an entrance at the rear of the store as well as one to the front, or to the north, of the store from West Landis Avenue. A construction timetable was not disclosed.

The Planning Board voted 8-0 to approve the 5,585-square-foot store, which will have eight gas-pump stations. But members did so only after approving numerous requests from Wawa for exceptions to city zoning regulations.

Notably, city planning staff and members thought the design engaged in "overkill" with the number, size and locations of signs. The negotiating over signage occupied more time than was spent on other issues.

In part that was because pre-meeting talks between Wawa and city representatives headed off arguments over more serious issues such as traffic patterns.

Wawa attorney Tyler Prime said the company, after a meeting Tuesday with the city, was dropping its idea to allow traffic exiting the property to head east with the flow of traffic and west against the flow.

City planners insisted that traffic should only exit eastward — “right in, right out” — with the flow of traffic into the city to avoid safety problems and congestion.

Under the approved plan, customers leaving the new Wawa, and wishing to head west out of the city, will have to exit from one of two driveways on South Mill. They head from there north to the intersection with West Landis Avenue, if they intend to head out of town or north on Mill Road.

“We understand that that’s a concern, a safety concern,” Prime said at the outset of the hearing. “It’s unusual for Wawa to make that change early in an application, but it’s something we understand is necessary.”

The Wawa property contains 4.38 acres and combines two separate lots, one holding a vacant ice cream shop and one a vacant house. It will have eight “multiple product dispensers, or pump stations, with 16 fueling positions, according to the design.

Unlike some Wawas, the store is not designed to accept large trucks other than those delivering store goods or gasoline.

The property is in an area zoned for business, but at its southern end abuts a residential area.

The proximity of houses led city officials to insist on less intense lighting for a store sign at the rear of the building. With screening, planners expect the store won’t prove intrusive to homeowners.

A traffic engineer for Wawa, Justin Taylor, testified traffic impacts should be minimal.

“They’re already commuting,” Taylor said. “They’re commuting from (route) 55 into downtown and vice versa. They’re already on Landis Avenue. And they’re already on Mill (Road).”

A nearby homeowner, Jeanne Brown, felt otherwise. In remarks to the board, she said she was concerned about what the effect would be on backing her vehicle out of her driveway.

Brown lives on South Mill Road, across the street from the property and close to the store’s second outlet on that road.

Voting for the plan were board Chairman David Manders, Vice Chairman Michael Pantalone, and members Steve Plevins, Samuel Fiocchi, John Casadia, Sandy Velez, Robert Odorizzi and David Acosta.

Joe Smith is a N.E. Philly native transplanted to South Jersey more than 30 years ago. He is a former editor and current senior staff writer at The Daily Journal in Vineland. Have a news tip? Reach out at (856) 563-5252 or jsmith@thedailyjournal.com or follow me on Twitter, @jpsmith-dj. Help support local journalism with a [subscription to The Daily Journal](#).

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