Gateway drugstore?

Public hearing for CVS/Five Guys is held open until May 27

by Terence P Ward

THE NEW PALTZ town Planning Board opened a public hearing on the CVS application on Monday, May 11, and most residents who spoke questioned whether a drug store and larger store were the best project for a location that serves as a gateway to New Paltz for those coming off the Thruway or from the east. While consultants for the applicant Trans-Hudson Management answered questions about many aspects of the plans which were posed by board members, eventually it became clear that no further changes are likely. The hearing was held open until May 27, so recommendations from the state Department of Transportation (DOT) can be considered as part of the application. The site is a parcel of just under six acres on the north side of Main Street, sandwiched between North Putt Corners Road and the Thruway. As it stands now, the plan calls for removal of all trees and vegetation and trucking in 33,000 cubic yards of fill to level the land, making room for a 13,225-square-foot CVS and a 2,600-square-foot building, which will house a Five Guys Burgers and Fries. There would be an entrance-only driveway on Main, and a two-way drive on the Putt Corners side of the lot. The Putt Corners/Main Street intersection is a planned connection route between the Walkill Valley and Hudson Valley rail trails, so one of the big questions hanging over the plan is exactly how the DOT intends on bringing the trail through, which is information the applicant has not yet finalized. One controversial detail of the plan which was introduced by DOT engineers is to replace the right-turn-only channelized "slip lane" with a turning lane that would be controlled by a traffic light.

Former town superintendent David Lent recalled the bottleneck which had snarled traffic over the Thruway bridge until the 1990s, when the intersection was upgraded, and said that the removal of the slip lane would make problems worse. "You cannot allow the elimination of the right turn onto North Putt," he said, a sentiment which was shared by many of those who spoke. Lent also recommended that the Putt Corners entrance be moved to the top of the hill in front of the site, to increase visibility for all involved drivers.

Speaking for herself and her partner Susan Glickstein, who is herself a professional planner, Katharine Stewart urged the board to issue a positive declaration of significance, which would trigger a full environmental impact statement for the project. "The plan has economic impact, noise and community character that should be seriously considered," she said. "It is a sensitive location, and a positive declaration would allow for rigorous analysis by many experts." She also pointed out that there is no reason for the board to accept CVS "cookie-cutter design" for the store, which is nearly half the size of Stop & Shop.

Fran Wishnick called into question the traffic study, because in her view it focuses entirely on the volume of cars and does not consider the impact of traffic maneuvers like making turns. She was also skeptical of the "internal trip credits" shown in that report that had a likely impact of this new store. Additionally, she rejected the need for a waiver the applicant requested, not to have to identify every tree that’s more than 12 inches in diameter at breast height. "You need to be very careful" in considering whether to grant the waiver, she said, because of the significant amount of clearing to be done at the site. Read aloud a letter signed by several town residents, Stana Weisburd brought forth a number of concerns about traffic and environmental impacts. The letter encouraged using the town’s wetlands inspector to determine how water flowing from the site might impact the new Millbrook Preserve, since the plot is part of the same watershed. Later in the meeting, consultants for the developer rejected the need for a wetlands inspector because there are no demarcated wetlands on the site, but at the same time acknowledged that some of the runoff from the site flows into a culvert that goes under Putt Corners Road to the west, where the preserve lies. Weisburd’s letter also encouraged considering how the parcel of trees might reduce air quality, since there would be that much less filtering of Thruway fumes, and referred to CVS as “the Walmart of pharmacies,” and said that the application makes a “mockery of our community values.”

Former town council member Kitty Brown spoke of the need for a habitat assessment, as the parcel had a need for migratory birds, even if it’s too small to be the permanent home to any wildlife. Regarding the parcel of trees, which had a need for high-end pharmacy services based on the fact that its nearest location is 13 miles away. No acknowledgement was made of the three pharmacies already in town.

When Ruger made a motion to keep the public hearing open, chairman Mike Calimano asked, “For how long, and for what purpose?” Perhaps jokingly, Laguna Yearwood replied, “For ever, and why not?”

In the end, the hearing was held over until Wednesday, May 27 – moving from the usual Monday to accommodate Memorial Day – and the consultants were given marching orders. In particular, a clear response from the DOT on how it will route pedestrian and bicycle traffic through the area is expected, as well as a narrative describing how the various traffic lights from Ohiouville down to Cherry Hill will be synchronized to mitigate traffic issues.

Have you heard?

We’re moving to 43 N. Chestnut St., New Paltz on May 15th!

SUNY New Paltz

SUNY New Paltz will hold its 2015 undergraduate commencement ceremony this Sunday, May 17 at 10 a.m. on the Old Main Quadrangle on the New Paltz campus. The graduate ceremony will be held this Friday, May 15 at 6 p.m. in the Sports Center, and Wellness Center. This year, there are 1,857 undergraduates and 586 graduate degrees being conferred. There will be more than 1,300 undergraduates and more than 225 graduate candidates participating in the ceremonies who will celebrate their achievements in the presence of their family and friends. The ceremonies will recognize two cohorts of students: August and December 2014 graduates and May and August 2015 candidates.

SUNY New Paltz president Donald Christian will preside over the undergraduate commencement ceremony. The salutatorian is Sarah Walling of Castleton-on-Hudson, and the valedictorian is Sarah Walling of Castleton-on-Hudson.

SUNY New Paltz’s commencement ceremonies will be webcast over the Internet. To access the webcasts visit http://totalwebcasting.com/live/newpaltz.

The undergraduate commencement ceremony will take place this Sunday, May 17 at SUNY New Paltz.