Proposal for storage facility on Falls Road draws fire

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Developer’s plan to build 366-unit complex raises concerns in town, village

Plans for construction of a rental storage facility that could have as many as 366 units in 11 buildings off Falls Road in the Town of Grafton have sparked concerns among local officials and residents.

Developer Brian Parrish of Paradigm Real Estate has applied for a zoning change needed for him to build the Grafton Self Storage facility on seven acres south of Falls Road between I-43 and the railroad tracks.

The facility would be adjacent to the Fox Tail Lane subdivision, whose residents have publicly objected to the project.

Plans call for the facility, which would be built in three phases, to have climate-controlled indoor units, a screened outdoor vehicle/boat storage area and a sales office.

Parrish has asked the town to approve the project as a planned-unit development, which would require changing the current agricultural zoning to business park use.

In his application, Parrish has proposed the first phase of the project to have four buildings with 246 units, followed by a second phase of five buildings with 94 units and a possible third phase of two buildings with 26 units.

The Grafton Town Board last week tabled consideration of Parrish’s petition for the zoning change after more than a dozen subdivision residents spoke against the project at a public hearing.

Most of the allowed uses in the business park zoning are for office and service uses. The residents voiced concerns about the density of the proposed buildings, as well as light pollution, wetlands, stormwater runoff, traffic and safety issues.
Residents also presented a petition opposing the zoning code change.

In voting 3-2 to postpone a decision on the requested change, the board tabled further consideration until January. The zoning amendment is required before the developer can apply for project approval.

Village of Grafton officials have also voiced concern about the project, which was scheduled to be considered this week by the village’s Plan Commission in an extraterritorial review.

In a report to the commission, Jessica Wolff, the village’s director of planning and development, said the project “has significant challenges, including narrow shape, wetlands requiring a waiver from the DNR and some relocation, and a navigable waterway.”

Wolff said her staff recognizes a demand for self-storage units in the Grafton area and that such facilities “are a good fit for town development” because the use does not typically require sewer and water services.

However, Wolff said, the project raises a number of concerns, including overbuilding of the site, insufficient setbacks, unscreened outdoor storage of vehicles that would be visible from I-43 and a shortage of information about lighting, fire-protection needs and proposed wall and monument signs facing Falls Road and I-43.

In his rezoning application, Parrish said the project site could have a value of $2.5 million at full development. He said the site would have an automatic gate with entry code, video surveillance and customer screening.

“Grafton Self Storage is architecturally pleasing, utilizes top-notch technology and would like to contribute to the rural character of the Town of Grafton,” the rezoning application states.
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However, Wolff questioned the impact of the proposed use.

“The site is overbuilt,” she said.

“It is unclear whether large vehicles, including fire apparatus and ambulances, could navigate between the buildings to allow full access to the site.”

Two buildings in the proposal “seem very isolated, which could encourage negative activities,” such as vandalism, theft and personal safety concerns, Wolff said.

In her report, Wolff recommended the village ask the town’s Plan Commission to consider having Parrish reduce the number of buildings, prohibit outdoor storage, and provide detailed information on lighting, signs and fire-protection plans.

The Town Plan Commission is expected to consider the project Jan. 4, one week before the next Town Board meeting.