

Sprawling RV dealership planned for Hwy. 33 area

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Camping World store on land near I-43 embraced by Saukville Plan Commission

At this time next year, local officials are confident outdoor enthusiasts will be flocking to the 28,860-square-foot Camping World SuperCenter approved Thursday by the Village of Saukville Plan Commission.

The camping sales and service center will be located on a nine-acre site on the north side of Highway 33, just west of the Pick 'n Save grocery store.

The location is along I-43's northbound on-ramp. That setting was especially appealing to Camping World, which specializes in catering to the needs of owners of recreational vehicles and campers.

Giving the business even more drawing power, a store sign will be mounted on a 45-foot pole along the interstate.

"The location gives them great visibility from I-43," Kimberly Penfold, president of the planning firm Siren Partners, told the commission. "This is a destination store, and there will be a lot of new people stopping in Saukville to go to the store on their way to Door County.

"This company is a big proponent of synergy. They are attracted to areas where customers are able to bring their RVs in for service, and be able to go to stores like Pick 'n Save, Walgreens or a restaurant while they wait."

Camping World, the nation's largest retailer of RVs and camping supplies, is based in Lincolnshire, Ill. It has 95 stores in 32 states, with the nearest being in DeForest just outside Madison.

Several months of behind-the-scene discussions with village staff members made the commission approval of the project seem almost routine last Thursday.

It was that attention to meeting the expectations of village officials that differentiated the Camping World proposal from the KwikTrip plan that failed to win village approval earlier this year, according to Village President Barb Dickmann.

"They came in with their initial plan, and we gave them a list of things we wanted changed. Then they came back addressing our initial concerns, and we gave them another list," Dickmann said.

"The Camping World folks were great to work with, and very responsive to whatever we

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suggested.”

Dickmann said the Saukville store will be much more attractive than the one the company operates outside of Madison, which she described as looking “very industrial.”

“What they first proposed was essentially a metal building, and we told them that wasn’t going to fly in what is the entry to our commercial district,” Dickmann said.

“We told them the building had to have at least the same quality as the existing buildings in the area, and the plan showed they followed through on that.”

The exterior of the building will feature insulated panels that will simulate stucco, with a variety of accents in cedar, stone and glass to give the walls character.

According to the planners, the Saukville building will be the company’s prototype for its new stores.

Security fencing will surround the perimeter of the property, although Penfold noted that the original chain-link plan was dropped in favor of powder-coated aluminium that will look like wrought iron.

That upgrade was made at the insistence of village officials.

Because of the layout of the parcel, entry to the store will be on the north side of the building. Significant attention, however, was given to the appearance of the south facade, which will face Green Bay Avenue.

“The windows are decorative and virtually every one was Barb’s idea,” Penfold said of the village president’s input on the design touches.

Access to the store will be from an extension of Boettcher Drive from Market Street. The store will pay for that road extension, along with a pedestrian walk leading to the Pick ‘n Save and decorative lighting similar what the village installed along its portion of the rebuilt Highway 33.

Because a roundabout provides access to the site from Highway 33 — which is Green Bay Avenue in the village — commission members questioned if the RVs would have trouble maneuvering the traffic circle.

“Ease of access is very important to Camping World. The company probably had six to eight executives drive up to the site, approaching from every direction, and they all felt there would be no problems,” said Mark Royal, CEO of Siren Partners.

Dickmann said the company’s attention to traffic concerns and commitment to leaving the wetlands on the north edge of the property untouched eliminated most potential objections before the plan advanced to the commission.

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“They told us they wanted to resolve all of the issues beforehand, so when the plan came before the Plan Commission it would be a one-meeting process,” Dickmann said.

In contrast, the KwikTrip proposal eyed for a parcel on the west side of I-43 was the subject of repeated meetings with village officials. It was ultimately rejected out of concern the gas station and convenience store posed a risk to nearby wetlands, and would worsen traffic congestion.

Penfold said Camping World usually builds SuperCenter stores on sites that are at least 15 acres, but chose the nine-acre parcel in Saukville because of its ideal location.

“We are all about living the outdoor lifestyle, so our desire is not to pave from lot line to lot line,” she said.

Still, about 70% of the parcel will be covered with building or asphalt. The code allows up to 90% of impermeable surfaces.

“I know that sounds like a lot of asphalt, but we are talking about RVs that take up a lot of space,” Dickmann said.

There will be space for approximately 300 RVs within the fenced area. Because of sales, stock is expected to change every six months.

With the quick approval from the commission, ground is expected to be broken on the project this summer with completion by next spring.