

Planning Commission supports Colonial Auto's expansion
written by Newspark Team | December 18, 2014



A local automotive dealership with property that will be affected by the construction of the grade-separated interchange at U.S. Route 29 and Rio Road has received support for its plans to expand along Berkmar Drive.

The Albemarle County Planning Commission on Tuesday unanimously recommended that the county's Comprehensive Plan be amended to accommodate Colonial Auto Center.

The dealership wants to use a residential property that fronts Berkmar Drive to improve inventory storage and access for employees, vendors and customers.

"We are asking you to act on your previous support for our plan," said Pete Borches, president of Carter Myers Automotive Properties. "The use of this property is natural to its surrounding uses and allows for local business to grow."

In October, the Board of Supervisors directed the Planning Commission to review the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment and make a recommendation by January.

The Places 29 Master Plan calls for a small-area plan to be conducted in the area around the intersection of U.S. 29 and Rio Road. A critical question in advance of this plan has been the nature of Myers Drive, a private road that eventually could connect U.S. 29 to Berkmar Drive.

The commission recommended that Myers Drive be kept free from impediments until the small-area plan can be completed and a study be done to see whether an extension of the road would be appropriate.

"We addressed reserving Myers Drive by not putting buildings in the proposed right of way," said Commissioner Bruce Dotson. "Would the applicant be dedicating that right of way or contributing to those improvements?"

Rachel Falkenstein, senior county planner, said county staff would ask for a proffer condition in the rezoning request to keep the area around Myers Drive free but it wouldn't be dedicated right of way.

"Once the determination is made, if the extension is deemed appropriate in that area, we would have to work that out with the property owner," Falkenstein said.

Commissioner Mac Lafferty said he was concerned that they would hold up the applicant if they didn't have a small-area plan that would address the matter.

"That interchange is going in fairly soon, and I think the connection to Berkmar would be paramount to their business," Lafferty said. "I don't want them to be tied up because we haven't defined the road."

Valerie Long, Borches' attorney, said their concept plan shows where they propose to have a new building. She said they had heard a lot about the potential Myers Drive extension over the past few months and the Board of Supervisors expressed skepticism in October whether the extension made sense.

"VDOT indicated they would most likely not accept that road into public system," Long said. "There is not a location for the extension that makes sense. ... We are hesitant to be held in limbo waiting for this."

Lafferty asked Borches if a county requirement to extend Myers Drive to Berkmar would be a deal-breaker.

Borches said he only controlled half of the road in that area and that a connector may not be feasible.

"We are talking about a 3.5 acre site," Borches said. "After we get done with our [storm] water treatment facility and add this road, the extension won't function for what we want to do."

In October, the Board of Supervisors also endorsed the submission of a separate rezoning application so both could be reviewed concurrently.

For the rezoning application, Long said they are proposing to change the parcel from a residential designation to highway commercial, based on a recommendation from Albemarle County staff.

"That is the zoning application though," she said. "Tonight's application is a proposal to amend the Comprehensive Plan designation from Urban Density Residential to Office/R&D/Flex/Light Industrial."

Along with approving the amendment, the commission recommended a two-year time frame for a small-area plan to be completed.

The commission's recommendations are slated to go before the Board of Supervisors at a Jan. 13 work session.