



S.P. Council Thwarts Car Dealership

**BY MATTHEW MORIARTY: STAFF WRITER**

The Southern Pines Town Council halted a bid Tuesday for a proposed Honda dealership by voting unanimously to rezone the property.

Steve Jones Honda had submitted a site plan to relocate its dealership from U.S. 15-501 in Aberdeen to land next to the Days Inn near the Morganton Road exit off U.S. 1 in Southern Pines.

Some have likened the rezoning to what Southern Pines did to Leith Automotive, rezoning land it wanted to build car dealerships on. Leith was much further along in the process when the town rezoned its land. It is currently suing the town.

Town leaders say that it is not like the Leith rezoning because the council and Planning Board had been talking about rezoning this particular property since 2006.

Shortly after Steve

Jones submitted his plan, the Planning Board recommended that the council rezone that property and two other tracts on U.S. 1 from commercial to office zoning, which would prohibit uses such as a car dealership and a drive-through restaurant.

"It's been my position since I came on the council," Councilman Fred Walden said, "not to see this area become congested like the southern part of U.S. 1."

Mayor Pro Tem Chris Smithson said that the rezoning has been in the works for years and insisted that it has nothing to do with the car dealership.

"One of the things this is not about," Smithson said, "despite what you read in The Pilot, is anything having to do with this particular dealership. ... This is not a reaction to any particular development."

The town also rezoned the municipal property where the police station sits from commercial to a category called Facilities Resources Recreation.

The council held a public hearing on the rezoning Tuesday. Several West Southern Pines residents spoke in favor of the rezoning and against the Honda dealership.

Libby Hines said that the rezoning accomplishes the purpose of the overlay district, to "conserve and enhance" the area.

Roy McKoy, pastor of the Pentecostal Assembly of Jesus Christ -- after some initial confusion about what exactly the council was hoping to accomplish -- said that he had been asked to speak against the dealership.

"This is an economically depressed area," he said. "We're not in a position, we cannot fight back against big money."

Veola McLean, Southern Pines' de facto historian by virtue of having been around the longest, said that she's worried that West Southern Pines is going to become home to all the development that the rest of the town doesn't want.

"Are we going to be where all of this is if nobody wants it in their neighborhood?" she said. "Why don't they locate it over in Highland Trails?"

Not everyone at the meeting favored the rezoning.

"It seems to me that we are cutting growth to nothing in this area," Dorothy Miller said. "The no-growth policy is a signal to businesses and future citizens not to move here. It will only lead to increases in property taxes."

Steve Jones said that he had approached the neighbors and offered them \$15,000 apiece as a way to offset the devaluation of their property.

"I've never had anything in my life be this big," he said. "Sometimes people get in a huff."

He pointed out that the office zoning would allow restaurants and therefore alcohol sales. He said during the public hearing that he has always tried to do the right thing, but it's pretty clear he will have to go somewhere else.

"I can go somewhere else," he said. "I'm planning on it, the way things are looking."

Don Calfee, general partner in Tams Properties, which owns the land, said that he was disappointed to hear the venom in some speakers' voices. He built what was then the Holiday Inn and said that 80 percent of the work force was black.

"I imagine a lot of you had kids that worked for me," he said. "It seems that everybody today wants something but doesn't want to give. We need industry. Where do you think taxes come from?"

He also said that he didn't think the town gave him proper notice of the public hearing.

Tim Sloan, who owns the adjoining property that the council also rezoned from commercial to offices, said that he bought the property thinking that the commercial zoning would someday make it worth a lot.

"You win some," said rezoning proponent Margaree Rich, "you lose some."

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