



W.P. Center Work Starts

**BY TOM EMREY: SENIOR WRITER**

Whispering Pines will ring in the new year like a lion -- a Food Lion.

After years of planning, discussing and negotiating, work crews will finally begin construction of a new shopping center anchored by a Food Lion grocery store, which will feature an in-store pharmacy with a drive-through.

The center, called Shops at Whispering Pines, is at the corner of N.C. 22 and Sullivan Avenue.

"Construction will begin in earnest on Jan. 4," said Village Manager Steve DeBolt. "Residents will for sure notice work being done on the site."

Construction on the center is expected to take six to eight months, meaning the store should be open to shoppers by late summer.

"We hope to be shopping in the fall," DeBolt said.

He added that he thought the store -- the first large grocery chain store in the village -- will be convenient for residents and enhance the quality of life for the village.

The Village Council paved the way for the work to begin just prior to Christmas, when it approved several revisions to a conditional-use permit, including a two-phase construction plan for the shopping center, which will be developed by JDH Capital.

Phase 1 includes the main building, which will house Food Lion along with four small storefronts.

Phase 2 includes two buildings located to the front of the main building. Phase 2 currently has no start or completion date.

Throughout the process, JDH Capital has worked closely with the village staff and consultants to design the shopping center, addressing -- in detail -- landscaping, lighting and stormwater issues.

To date, the council has approved the stormwater plan, one for landscaping and another for lighting. A sign plan must still be approved, but that is not required before construction starts.

JDH Capital has been attempting to develop a shopping center in Whispering Pines for nearly three years.

Developers first pitched their idea for a shopping center that would be the "gateway" to the village in March 2007. At that time, some residents felt the development would mar the charm of the village.

Residents raised concerns about whether the area could support such a shopping center, citing the failures of the Bi-Lo and Kmart in Southern Pines. Others were worried that opening up the village to a shopping center could pave the way for more invasive development.

From the beginning of that discussion, Mayor Bob Zschoche, along with other members of the council, has maintained

that the development would move forward only if it was beneficial to the village and to its residents.

The developer and residents who favored the shopping center have maintained that it is needed and desired by residents.

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