

Coffee shop in Wyndhurst nixed for now

Consignment shop in its place

By Larry Perl
lperl@patuxent.com

Posted 6/17/09

Citing community opposition, the owner of Wyndhurst Station has put plans for a coffee shop on the back burner.

"People are more passionate about it than I would have guessed," said shopping center owner Michael Weinfeld, of Kittredge Properties.

He said he would write a letter to community leaders and merchants this week, telling them he won't pursue plans for a specialty coffee shop and cafe unless the community can come to a clearer consensus in favor of the idea.

Weinfeld wanted to open an eatery in the old Executive Sweets candy and gift shop, to cater to customers and merchants, as well as the nearby Roland Park Pool crowd. The restaurant would serve breakfast and lunch, including bagels, muffins, gourmet coffees, paninis and ice cream. It would have a panini press, but no kitchen. But the plans are "on hold," Weinfeld said June 12. And he rented the retail space at least temporarily to two women who opened a consignment clothing shop June 13.

In a straw vote taken during a Wyndhurst Improvement Association meeting May 13, area residents and merchants favored a coffee shop and cafe, 14-5.

But the minority -- including John Murphy, of Blythewood, a prominent zoning and land use attorney -- were vocal in their opposition. Several others at the meeting expressed mixed feelings.

A 1976 covenant agreed to by a previous owner of the center prohibits food-related uses there. The covenant, signed by the community associations of Wyndhurst, Roland Park and Blythewood, is still in effect 33 years later, and would have to be amended to allow a coffee shop and cafe.

Many merchants in the shopping center and residents in the area complain that there is no place to eat.

"A high percentage of our customers are families with young children," Shenanigans toy store co-owner David Stelzer said at the Wyndhurst meeting on May 13. "They all say, 'I want something to eat.' And they are the neighborhood."

But other residents, including Lawrence Schramm, who was president of the association when the covenant was signed, oppose an eatery, saying it would lead to foul odors, traffic, noise and loitering by teenagers.

Even without a kitchen, "it can only cause problems," Schramm said at the meeting.

"You seem like a fine fellow," Murphy told Weinfeld, 38, who swam at the Roland Park Pool as a youth growing up in Homeland. But Murphy said his community, Blythewood, is "not terribly tranquil" to begin with and that Wyndhurst Station was designed to be a low-intensity commercial use.

"Just from a selfish standpoint, I want to maintain the tranquility of my neighborhood," he said at the meeting.

Weinfeld said at the meeting that he considers an eatery an amenity for the community, but that he wouldn't pursue his plan if it divided the community.

He reiterated that stance last week.

"There were unexpected pockets of opposition," he said and specifically named Murphy. "Before we move forward we need to work through this opposition. We're going to defer to the neighborhood. As the landlord, I think I've pushed this as far as I can. It's really to some extent in the hands of the neighborhood to sort through it."

But he added, "Once we get the consensus of the neighborhood, we would bend over backwards to make it happen."

For now, Weinfeld is leasing the 1,200-square-foot former candy store space to two Ruxton women who have opened Re Deux, a consignment store for high-end women's clothing (see story, Page 13).

"Our thought is, we want to support them in any way we can," he said. "We're going to play their tenancy by ear."

user comments (0)