

Brandon neighbors face Round II of fight over alcohol sales at strip mall

By Kevin Brady, Times Correspondent

In Print: Friday, July 20, 2012 BRANDON — Oak Park residents have another fight on their hands to stop wet-zone permits for businesses that want to open in a neighboring shopping plaza.

In May, the county's zoning master ruled against variances that would have allowed alcohol sales at a restaurant and a liquor store planning to open at the Oak Park Plaza at Lumsden Road and Kings Avenue in Brandon.

The plaza's owner, Winbran Corp., has won an appeal of that ruling. The county's Land Use Appeals Board voted 7-0 last week to send both variances back a zoning master. "In my opinion, the land use board did not see the addition of a small local restaurant as impacting a shopping center that has all the infrastructure required by the county for a typical shopping center use," said Todd Pressman, Winbran's lobbyist.

The plaza is home to O'Brien's Irish Pub and the Shrimp Warehouse, which both sell alcohol. Two free-standing buildings under construction at the plaza also plan to serve drinks.

Residents are concerned that alcohol permits for two additional businesses will open the door to more applications for stores that can sell alcohol.

"We are not Ybor City, and this is depreciating our home values further," said Gwen Plyler, secretary of the Oak Park Homeowners Association, a 75-home development near the plaza.

In successfully appealing the case, Pressman also pointed out that the plaza was once home to a beer and wine package sales store as well as other restaurants.

"The board was also pretty clear in understanding that the issues raised by the residents were directed by them to other tenants in the center," Pressman said.

In opposing the new liquor store and restaurant at the first hearing in April, many residents had complained of noise and parking issues related to O'Brien's Irish Pub & Family Restaurant. O'Brien's owners and residents have since sat down and ironed out those issues, something Pressman says he plans to do before the next public hearing.

"It's important to me to sit down with residents and work out issues, but for some reason they don't want to and I don't know why," Pressman said. "We want to resolve the residents' concerns, but we also don't want to stop two small local businesses from opening."