

Hillsborough County Commission rezones Apollo Beach site despite residents' concerns

By Sarah Whitman, Times Staff Writer

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APOLLO BEACH — A rezoning controversy involving a little more than 2 acres of land off U.S. 41 came to an end Tuesday when commissioners voted 6-0 in favor of the developer.

At the hearing last week, commissioners said they saw no reason to vote against the rezoning, disappointing residents who live near the area and had argued against development of the land.

The rezoning application has long been controversial. At a hearing last September, neighboring residents fought to prevent the land, south of Miller Mac Road and west of Fauna Lane, from being turned into professional office space, arguing that the area is mostly wetlands.

About 300 people signed a petition back then opposing a proposal by property trustee Sam Reiber to rezone 0.28 acres for commercial development and 2 acres for offices.

Aside from a day care and children's gymnasium, the area in question remains undeveloped. Bobcats, raccoons and other animals live on the land. Development would affect wildlife and cause traffic concerns, Southshore Falls resident Bruce Davis complained, prompting the Environmental Protection Commission to request further investigation.

In the following months, a wetlands mitigation study determined that the developer could build without intruding on conservation areas because the property consists of only 3 percent wetlands.

"We made an agreement with EPC not to build within a certain distance of those protected areas," Todd Pressman, representative for the developer, said late last week. "We did everything that was asked of us."

Like many of his neighbors who showed up at Tuesday's meeting, Davis disagrees.

"When they conducted that study, it was during a dry season," Davis said. "If they went back into that area now, they'd see that property is a lot wetter."

Davis said Miller Mac Road often floods in the summer months. He worries developing the nearby land may make problems worse. He also is concerned about an increase in traffic, and that the developer will cut down trees. He also worries the developer has no real intent to build office space, but instead plans to sell.

"I think they purposely went for this type of rezoning verses planned development because they didn't have to show a building plan," Davis said. "As a business owner, why would you want to have this location? To me, there's something missing."

Pressman said traffic shouldn't be a problem, as for the land being used for purposes other than specified, "That's impossible," he said. "The zoning was extremely specific to that criteria. It's written in stone."

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