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Planning commission OKs Whitman zoning request

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MONROE -- Controversial zoning changes sought by Jon Whitman for land near his former car dealership on Sterns Road near Lewis Avenue were endorsed last week by the Monroe County Planning Commission.

The move is opposite that of some other governmental boards and experts.

But Robert Pevin, county planning director, said some commission members felt Mr. Whitman's application was consistent with the county master plan, which suggests commercial use for the land.

Unlike the township, which has three levels of commercial use, the county planning agency has one designation for commercial development.

"You could interpret the proposed zoning designation would be consistent with the county plan," Mr. Pevin said.

The county planning commission voted 8-0 after a public hearing in support of C3 commercial zoning -- the least restrictive classification for retail development -- for about 20 acres, rejecting the recommendation from its staff to deny the request.

The rezoning application will move to the Bedford Township Board, which has the final word on the request.

Dennis Jenkins, the township's coordinator of community development and planning, said the board is tentatively scheduled to address the zoning changes June 7.

Mr. Whitman, who closed his Ford dealership on Lewis last month, is asking for the rezoning to make his land more attractive to developers. With the exception of his vacant car lot, the property is mostly farmland.

The land at issue includes roughly eight acres that Judge Joseph Costello, Jr., rezoned from residential to commercial as the result of a land-use lawsuit against the township. Judge Costello ruled Jan. 28 in favor of Mr. Whitman following a civil trial in Monroe County Circuit Court.

If approved, the zoning would put all but about 11 acres of 43 acres of dealership land in the type of zoning that would allow for big-box stores and other retail businesses and create one of the township's largest blocks of high-intensity commercial zoning.

The county planning staff said Mr. Whitman's request is contrary to the township master plan and doesn't provide appropriate transitions to residential neighborhoods.

Changing the land to C3 "would only open this site up for even more intensive uses, ones that are not appropriate for an area that is so close to residential portions of the township," the report said.

The township planning commission recommended against the application 5-1 on April 27.

Adam Young, planner with the township's planning consultant, recommended against the proposal on roughly the same grounds as the county planners.

His review found C-3 zoning inconsistent with the master plan, too intensive for the mixed residential zoning on Whitman-owned land to the west, and the wrong buffer to the neighborhood beyond.