

Stirling center rezoning endorsed

Mixed-use complex planned near I-12

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By Charlie Chapple
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The St. Tammany Parish Zoning Commission Tuesday night recommended the commercial zoning sought by Stirling Properties for an undeveloped 89-acre tract adjoining its Stirling Covington Center in the southeast quadrant of Interstate 12 and Louisiana 21.

The unanimous recommendation to rezone the property -- just to the east and behind the regional shopping center -- from suburban agriculture to highway commercial will be forwarded to the Parish Council for official approval.

Because the zoning change had the support of nearby homeowners groups, council approval is considered a formality.

Stirling attorney Jeff Schoen said the 89 acres will be developed for a mixture of uses, including office buildings, retail businesses and hotels.

James E. Maurin, chairman of Stirling's board of directors, said the westernmost part of the tract next to the shopping center could be used for an extension of the center. The rest of the property, Schoen said, will be developed for offices and businesses "in an office park environment."

The eastern border of the property abuts a closed interstate rest area, which the parish is converting into a second interchange for Louisiana 21.

Stirling, through a public-private venture, is working with the parish to build a four-lane boulevard from the rest area west to Louisiana 21 at East Brewster Road, the entrance into the shopping center. The boulevard will form the southern border of the 89 acres proposed for rezoning. Stirling also owns more than 80 acres to the south of proposed boulevard, which Maurin said eventually will be developed for residences.

Schoen said Stirling is donating a 100-foot-wide right of way for the boulevard, which will include a 20-foot-wide median. Maurin said motorists will be able to travel on the boulevard in 12 to 15 months.

Stirling also is contributing \$1.25 million to the parish toward construction of the new \$9.7 million interchange and \$5 million toward construction of the boulevard. Stirling, in return, will receive developmental impact fee credits from the parish as its properties are developed.

Schoen said the parish did an extensive traffic study of the Louisiana 21 corridor that concluded that the four-lane boulevard will be able to handle all of the traffic from the development of Stirling's and other nearby properties in the rapidly growing area.

Because of the new interchange and boulevard, the rezoning "in our minds, makes sense," said Rick Wilke, president of the Association of Associations, a coalition of homeowners groups.

"We congratulate Stirling and the parish for coming up with a plan that works," said Sandra Slifer, president of the nearby Flower Estates subdivision homeowners association.

The parish also is working with Colonial Properties Trust and the Wainer Brothers to build a \$10 million boulevard from the new interchange north of the interstate to Louisiana 21. The six-lane boulevard will go through the proposed \$220 million Colonial Pinnacle Nord du Lac lifestyle center across the interstate from Stirling's properties.

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