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Clemson City Council approves first reading of Kelly Road rezoning

By GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — A request by the Hamilton Property Group to rezone Kelly Road, consisting of 2.83 acres adjoining Freedom Drive, moved one step closer to fruition as Clemson City Council provided unanimous first reading approval Monday night.

But council's decision didn't come before Paul Schliefer, who opposes the project had a final say.

"We want Home Rule, but we're going to let a company tell us how to build it," Schliefer said, referring to comments made by city officials earlier in the meeting regarding state mandates passed down to municipalities.

Tom Hamilton, of the Hamilton Property Group of Greenville, declined to comment when asked by Abernathy to address council. However, Hamilton has previously said that the rezoning would allow completion of efforts to construct a shopping center on Freedom Drive that could include an anchor grocery store.

In January, City Council unanimously approved both the rezoning and a partial road closure for Freedom Drive, paving the way for the shopping center development near the intersection of U.S. Highway 123 and S.C. Highway 93. But the planning commission later denied the rezoning request because, according to Zoning Director Bob Vecchio, "They got hung up on the development of the project."

"There was discussion on how the property would be used in the future, consisting of multi-use with a detention pond," Vecchio said. "There were questions among the planning commission on-site design and site standards."

However, Vecchio said the Freedom Drive/Kelly Road project is covered in the architectural overlay standards used for the impending construction of Chick-fil-A and similarly with Tillman Place.

Last month, Schliefer told City Council members that the demise of Food Lion after only 14 months as well as a conversation with a Publix official, who said the store would not build in Clemson unless it could locate on the Freedom Drive/Kelly Road site, should serve as warnings.

"The project would completely level the property, kill trees and forever change the character of the area," Schliefer said.

Two readings are required on the rezoning request, unless an amendment occurs prior to second reading. If that were to occur, then three readings would be required.

Clemson Mayor Larry Abernathy told Schliefer he typically does not allow comments to be made by the audience outside of public comment.

"I am willing to listen to anything people bring to me about this issue, but that's the way this process works," he said.