

Board eyes drive-through Starbucks

By MARY LANNON

Guilderland may get another Starbucks, only about a half mile from its other one in Stuyvesant Plaza and just across the street from the University at Albany.

The proposed coffee shop, unveiled at the planning board meeting Jan. 26, will be the first in the Capital District to have a drive-through, said engineer Bill Mafri of Hershberg and Hershberg, a local engineering company that developed the plans for the national chain.

The planning board tabled the proposal, asking for more information. After the meeting, a neighboring store and the local neighborhood association weighed in on the proposal.

According to an e-mail from Starbucks spokeswoman, Nicole Morales, the store's proximity to the one in Stuyvesant Plaza is intended to serve a larger customer base.

"The Stuyvesant Plaza store is not convenient to all customers traveling down Western Avenue. We are increasingly sensitive to the needs of our varying customer base," Morales said in the e-mail.

She went on to explain in the e-mail that parents with children will appreciate the new store's drive-through.

The company has only a "limited



Starbucks

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number” of stores with drive-throughs, she said in the e-mail, but one will open in Queensbury on Feb. 11.

The 1,650-square-foot beige and cream-colored building will not have any of the traditional green on the building, according to pictures provided with the application.

Lettering on the building will be white, though a sign with a green and white logo will stand out front. An outdoor seating area is also planned. Dennis Quadrini currently owns the property.

A manager at Uncommon Grounds, the nearest competition to the new store, said he wasn't too worried.

“In general, the position we take is that as a coffee shop and a restaurant, we are not intimidated by the competition,” said assistant manager Tyler Allen. “We have pretty loyal customers.”

Still the location caused him some concern.

“Right across the street, I don't think that can be a good thing. But I'm pretty secure about the group of people that come in. They'll remain loyal,” Allen said.

In keeping with the shop's outsider ethos, Allen also had general remark about his soon-to-be competition.

“And Starbucks, for being a corporation, is not that bad,” he said.

Another local store Dunkin

Donuts, 1232 Western Ave. may also be affected. Efforts to reach representatives of that chain were unsuccessful.

As for area residents, one neighborhood group has already filed a protest against the proposal.

In an e-mail to the board, McKownville Neighborhood Improvement Association president Don Reeb said that allowing the store would be poor planning on the part of the town.

“Piecemeal exploitation of the area as exemplified by the Starbucks' proposal is not the way to achieve significant betterment of the community,” Reeb said in his e-mail.

Specifically, the three lots between Sutter's Mill and Mining Company and the Best Western should be planned together, Reeb said in the e-mail.

The new Starbucks would combine two of those lots. The plan also calls for the coffee shop's entrance to be at the stoplight and directly across from the University entrance.

Town planner Jan Weston and several planning board members praised the plan to put one entrance at the light across from the University.

Board members were concerned about how the applicant was interpreting the parking space code. The plan currently calls for 51 spaces, but Weston said it may not have properly considered the outdoor seating area in its calculations.

The board also needs to see the parking agreement with Sutters since that will infringe on the available parking, board chairman Steve Feeney said. He added that he was also concerned about the proposed location of the sidewalks, which don't appear to be in the town right-of-way. Also, he added the town currently has grant money for improvements in that area, and Starbucks should consult with that firm on current plans for the area.

Starbucks first opened in 1971

in Seattle. In 1981 current chairman of Starbucks Howard Schultz joined the company and in 1984 he convinced its founders to open a coffee bar in downtown Seattle.

In 1987, Schultz acquired the Starbucks' business. By 1990 Starbucks had 84 locations nationwide. The company grew by leaps and bounds with 676 stores by 1995 and 3,501 by 2000, according to its Web site. At the end of 2004, there were 8,337 stores worldwide.