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Crossgates mall developer willing to alter traffic plan

By EDWARD CAREY
and SHARON GAZIN

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The managing partner of Pyramid Crossgates Co., developer of the proposed \$85 million Crossgates mall in Guilderland, says his firm will change its Western Avenue-Schoolhouse Road traffic plan to resolve questions of air quality raised by the state environmental conservation commissioner.

Commissioner Robert F. Flacke announced Tuesday that potential violations of air quality standards that might be caused by traffic from the mall — specifically at Western Avenue-Schoolhouse Road — may be mitigated by changes in traffic signals, realignment of Schoolhouse Road or the Northway exit ramp, and other changes.

"We'll do any of these or some combination of them that would resolve the question on air quality," Crossgates' Bruce Kenan said Tuesday.

Flacke gave all parties until May 14 "to submit factual information . . . which addresses the ability to mitigate factors contributing to any identified potential violation of the air quality" at the site, referred to as "Intersection 1."

Kenan said his company will submit to Flacke "proposals to fine-tune the situation at Intersection 1 to make sure there are no air quality problems," but "no detailed drawings" will be given to the commissioner during the two weeks.

"Exactly what they (EnCon officials) want in the next two weeks, I'm not clear about. The whole process (of drawing up detailed drawings for the site) cannot be done in two weeks," Kenan said, noting he will send copies of Flacke's decision to "our consultants" to get their opinions.

He also noted Pyramid Crossgates still hopes for a fall 1982 opening for the mall, provided the company gets the permits it needs from EnCon, as well as a special-use permit from the town's Zoning Board of Appeals.

Flacke's decision means an environmental hearing will not be reopened, which mall opponents had requested. Flacke must determine by the end of June whether to grant 11 environmental permits needed before construction can begin on the mall.

Flacke said that although members of his staff had brought to his attention the fact three receptor points on the north side of Western Avenue

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demonstrate a potential for violation of air quality standards, those conditions could be abated by changes in the area.

During a hearing on the mall, a series of receptor points where air quality data was predicted were outlined. Harry Hovey, director of the EnCon Air Division, said the receptors at Addressograph, a laboratory on Western Avenue and Roberts Realty were predicted to have carbon monoxide levels that would violate ambient quality air standards until 1985.

Hovey said changes in traffic plans would be made, beginning with the simplest possible, to see if the proposed mall could meet standards.

"First they might change the signal timing, then improve the traffic flow, and widen the intersection (with Schoolhouse Road,)" he said.

Hovey said traffic signals might be changed so the ratio between red and green light time would be different to see if air quality predictions could be improved.

He said possible realignment of Schoolhouse Road or the Northway would be considered later.

"The Department of Transportation might think of a possible intersection change as the most drastic measure," Hovey said.

Charles Carlson, Transportation Department regional director, said the air quality problem is "rather marginal" and that the department would look at a variety of methods of mitigating possible violation.

He said plans to realign Schoolhouse Road if necessary were "tentative."

"Different phasing and changes in traffic light signals might be enough," Carlson said.

Hovey said all traffic improvements needed to mitigate air quality violations would have to be completed before the mall could open.

"The whole thing has to do with traffic flow. If you

speed up the traffic flow, change the pattern, change the input, change the output, and the length of queued traffic . . . these would go into correcting the violation," Hovey said.

The department also is considering altering a "calibration factor" of 0.65 used in setting up a traffic model of air quality standards.

Hovey said this figure, used by both the Pyramid Crossgates Co. and EnCon, "may be overly conservative because of the terrain at the intersection." He said the 0.65 value usually is used in "canyons" where buildings are extremely tall, and might be the wrong factor for the area.

"Indeed, a factor of 0.5 or 0.4 may be more appropriate," he said.

Kenan said: "Our experts tell us it (the 0.65 value) is too conservative. We remained conservative in our analyses because we were going into public hearings. If you go into the thing being conservative, there's no basis for their (opponents') criticisms. But there's nothing too conservative for them (anti-Crossgates groups), so they criticized everything."

An opponent of the mall, Lindsay Childs, charged Crossgates and EnCon were "fudging the figures" they had agreed to use during the hearing.

Kenan called "baseless accusations" charges by Childs' wife, Rhonda, president of Concerned Citizens Against Crossgates, and John Shea, attorney for the McKownville Improvement Association, another mall opponent, that Pyramid officials have been meeting illegally with EnCon officials.

Kenan said representatives of his company never have met Flacke or William Dickerson, the hearing officer for the hearings on the company's applications, outside the public hearing process.

Mrs. Childs and Shea charged mall representatives have met EnCon officials secretly and that this is against department regulations. Kenan said representatives of his company are barred only from meeting Flacke and Dickerson.