

Residents debate drugstore plan

Lack of information irks E. McKeesport citizens

By Debra Holz

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Some East McKeesport residents have voiced their opposition to the development of an Eckerd drugstore along Route 30, contending too little information about the project has been released.

"What I want to know is why we weren't told about this sooner, so we could express our opinions and concerns about this development and find out how it will interrupt our neighborhood as far as lighting, noise and traffic," resident Frank Bugajski shouted to project developers Thursday night.

Officials and residents heard about the plans at a meeting with representatives of East McKeesport Realty Associates Ltd. of North Huntingdon, Eckerd's developer.

During the past two months, developers negotiated and completed purchases of 20 residential and commercial properties to make room for the 11,200-square-foot drugstore and 64-space parking lot along Route 30 between Fifth Avenue and Broadway Street.

Bugajski pointed to that location, saying "there has always been a speeding and accident problem in the area." He contended the problems will worsen with the new development.

East McKeesport Police Chief Richard Michaels said traffic is frequently congested in the area and there have been nine traffic accidents at the intersection since January, two involving serious injuries.

"This is going to create more problems than ever with traffic and livability in the community," said

resident Joann Detwiler. "I don't understand why the council didn't address these issues with us before things got this far."

Local officials were not aware of the project until some residents, whose homes were purchased by the developers recently, privately discussed their plans with council members, said council President Rita Lavella.

"We were as much in the dark about this as all of you," Lavella told residents at the meeting. "As soon as we knew, we told you ... And tonight we know as much as you do."

When the developers completed property purchases, they applied to the borough for a building permit but previously had no obligation to address the council, borough Engineer Don Glenn explained.

Borough permits needed to begin demolition and construction have not been issued, pending completion of a state Department of Transportation traffic study and storm water management studies, Glenn said.

Developers have contacted PennDOT about the Eckerd development.

"We anticipate (PennDOT) studies will be complete within two to three weeks," said Frank Patrick, PennDOT's transportation construction inspection supervisor.

"We expect to begin demolition and construction within a month," said Jerry Cooper, speaking on behalf of the development company. "But I don't anticipate any problems obtaining the necessary permits because we intend to be in complete compliance with all existing zoning ordinances."