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Ordinance reins in 'big boxes'

Projects over 40,000 square feet will require special permit

By AMY RINARD

arinard@journalsentinel.com

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Oconomowoc - The city will have greater control over large scale, so-called big-box developments under an ordinance approved this week by the Common Council.

Advertisement Under the ordinance, any proposed building project of 40,000 square feet or more will require a conditional use permit. That means these proposals will be subject to public notifications, a public hearing, review by the Plan Commission and approval by the council. Developers also will have to conduct studies of the traffic impact of proposed large projects.

"This doesn't mean blocking anything, but these kinds of projects have impacts both visually and on traffic, and we want to have a say," Mayor Maury Sullivan said Wednesday.

He said many municipalities have such ordinances, and often they are approved in response to a particular project that has been proposed.

Sullivan said the city's ordinance was not approved to deal with any development already proposed but to prepare for any future large-scale projects.

"We don't want to sit and wait," he said. "We want to have adequate protections."

City Planner Jason Gallo said some recent large developments and proposals for projects in excess of 40,000 square feet were required to go through the conditional use permit process because of their intended purpose, not their size.

An example is a proposed Hilton Garden Inn hotel planned for a 3.2-acre site in Pabst Farms, Gallo said. The building will be 65,000 square feet and have 101 guest rooms.

Even without the new ordinance, Gallo said, the project would have had to go through the conditional use permit process because it is a hotel, and under another city ordinance, any development with guest rooms has to obtain that type of permit.

Gallo said the new ordinance will require this procedure for all large-scale projects regardless of their use.

The traffic impact study is especially important for large developments, he said. "We want to make sure that all the public improvements are in place to handle the traffic," he said.

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