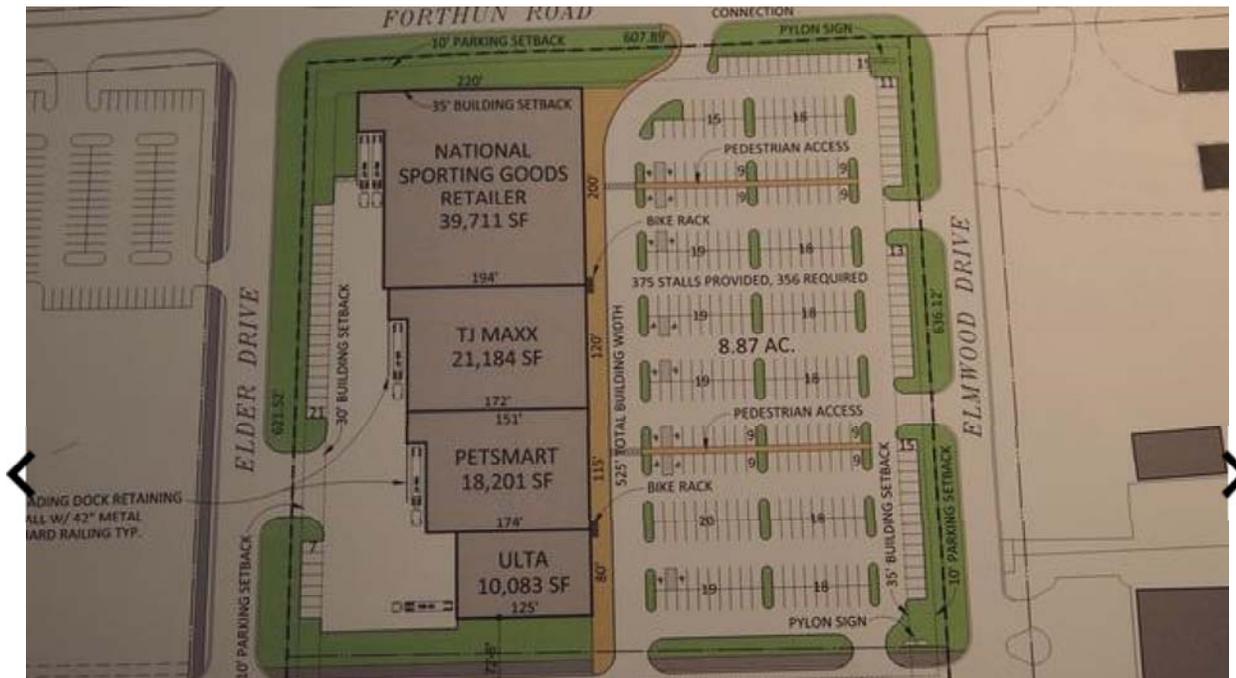




Developers unveil plans for stores, restaurants in Baxter

By [Renee Richardson](#) on May 14, 2016 at 10:13 p.m.



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BAXTER—Shoppers and diners in the lakes area may have a few more options in the near future.

Development plans were unveiled recently during a Baxter Planning and Zoning Commission meeting. On the list are a national sporting goods retailer that was unnamed, T.J. Maxx, PetSmart and ULTA Beauty cosmetics.

In addition, developers plan to construct three new restaurants.

And Jackpine Brewery announced plans to move, build and expand operations and its taproom with Nor-Son looking at constructing a building on Edgewood Drive.

Last week, HJ Development sought approval for two planned unit developments. One was for an estimated 89,000-square-foot retail shopping center. The retail center would be built on 8.87 acres of undeveloped land between Costco and J.C. Penney Co.

"It is the intention of the applicant to deliver a building that is both architecturally significant and built to last so that it remains a complement to Baxter's growing commercial district for years to come," developers reported. "Pedestrian friendly design elements have been incorporated into the development."

For a size comparison, Costco development plans called for 142,705 square feet of warehouse space. While a few development concepts have come before Baxter recently, the city hasn't fielded applications for construction on this scale in some time.

After Costco joined the Baxter business landscape in 2012, expectations were other businesses would soon follow, especially in that section of the city. It may have taken a little longer than anticipated. Other proposals for business additions—particularly redevelopment attempts at the old Wal-Mart store site where Gander Mountain is—have not yet come to fruition.

But it appears a number of national retailers are ready to expand and build here.

Bob Kinzel, Baxter's planning commission chairman, asked if Dick's Sporting Goods was the unnamed sporting goods store, but developers said they could not say the name of the retailer.

In addition to the retail shopping center, HJ Development was also the applicant for a Central Lakes Crossing Third Addition near the intersection of Highway 371 and Glory Road. This proposal is on the undeveloped land near Wal-Mart across the highway from Olive Garden. Plans call for three restaurants and a landscaped pond, which would face the Paul Bunyan State Trail and Highway 371. No names were mentioned for the restaurant properties.

Josh Doty, community development director, noted the proposed development has sidewalks along the storefronts and to connect both north and south.

Planning and zoning commissioners questioned the applicants on several points, notably the requested size of the pylon signs and screening, particularly along Elder Drive.

Three restaurants

Among issues for the Central Lakes Crossing development proposed on Glory Road is a sight corridor connected to the deed requiring any construction on the land to maintain a sight line from the Highway 371/Glory Road intersection to Wal-Mart.

Baxter's zoning ordinance requires a 35-foot setback for the front yard. The applicant proposed a setback of 10 feet. Doty noted there is an existing trail within that space. Doty said looking ahead to traffic burdens in the future, a

dedication of 10 feet of right of way on Glory Road is required to allow for a future turn lane.

If the applicant moved the planned unit development for the restaurant pads and the parking lot back 10 feet, there would be room for the right of way dedication. Doty said then the planned unit development's flexibility would allow developers to have a 10-foot setback instead of 35 feet. Developers said they understood the concerns and would go back and look at a redesign of the site and changing the pond's shape to be able to keep the water element while maintaining the sight line requirement.

Signs

"Visibility to Highway 371 is very important to these tenants and their success in the city of Baxter hence the request for flexibility pertaining to signage that goes beyond ordinance guidelines," Chris Moe, HJ Development, wrote in a narrative presented for the retail center project with T.J. Maxx, the sporting goods store, ULTA cosmetics and PetSmart.

Moe, accompanied by Matthew Anderson, architect with Pope Architects in St. Paul, presented plans for the "junior box retail development" to the commission. Jon Pope, CEO of Pope Architects, was also in attendance.

Developers asked for 800 square feet of signs, exceeding the city's ordinance. Doty said because of the size of the retail center, staff was comfortable with two freestanding signs instead of one given the retailers included. If the stores were not connected but instead were built individually, the ordinance allows for a 200-square-foot sign. Doty noted the request was double what would be allowed.

Kinzel said he understands everyone wants as much square footage for signs as they can get. It's always an issue, Kinzel said.

Moe said with buildings and trees between the retail development and Highway 371, the larger signs were needed. Moe noted the retailers could have 800 square feet of signage if they each built separately and said the planned unit development should allow for more flexibility not less.

Kinzel said once the retail center is established, people will find it and word will spread.

"I'd kind of like to stay within our ordinance on some of this stuff," Kinzel said, later adding he was excited about the project and hoped the sign size wasn't the difference maker.

"I have tenants who feel strongly about this," Moe said. "... I don't know how they are going to react to that."

Commission member Bob Ryan said if four individual buildings went into the space they'd whittle away the green space and not leave many trees. Ryan noted the applicant was asking for two signs with the same amount of square footage the four retailers would be allowed individually if all four signs were added together.

After an extended discussion on sign size with commission members apparently on either side of the issue, Lund made a compromise motion to allow a total of 600 square feet. It passed unanimously. Now the project will go to the Baxter City Council with the planning commission recommendations.

For the other planned development on Glory Road, applicants agreed to limit the pylon sign to include the tenants in the project. The proposed monument sign has room for six tenant names and other could be added as stores or restaurants are added in the future.

Screening

Commission member Gwen Carleton was concerned about the traffic flow from Highway 210 to Elder Drive, noting there is confusion as people drive north out of Costco with some drivers pulling into oncoming traffic looking to turn west. This proposed retail center will just add to the traffic levels, Carleton said.

Elder Drive connects with Highway 210 on the north end and serves as the main access road to Costco. Elder Drive runs between Costco and Home Depot before passing J.C. Penney's west side, intersecting with Glory Road and Leading to Wal-Mart. It's a primary route in Baxter. Developers have designed the buildings to have its back and loading docks face Elder Drive as the retail center faces toward Highway 371.

Moe said he was confident the landscaping plan would be adequate.

Commissioners wanted to make sure the loading docks, which other businesses have had to screen with walls or designed their buildings to have on the sides, were well screened. HJ Development stated plans for a heavily landscaped earthen berm with rows of trees as a screen. There wasn't a plan in place for irrigation. Dead trees that didn't establish roots and survive would be replaced.

Commission member Steve Lund said the landscaping wouldn't last long without regular water especially during the first years as trees take hold. The commission noted J.C. Penney and Costco both irrigated when they didn't have screening walls. Following the discussion, the developers said they'd be willing to irrigate.

Additionally, the city's landscaping ordinance calls for overstory deciduous trees where developers planned ornamental trees, which the city does allow with pedestrian connections in the parking area.

Recommendations will now go the city council. Council member Steve Barrows attended the session as council liaison.

Mayor Darrel Olson, who also attended the commission meeting, thanked city staff for the work they were doing for all the projects. He said: "It's going to be a good summer."

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