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By Elaine Thompson
Telegram & Gazette Staff

Posted Nov. 9, 2015 at 9:46 PM

SHREWSBURY – Town meeting members approved an ordinance that will prohibit the mass removal of trees until a construction project is ready to be done.

The new bylaw in general prohibits the removal of all trees in a woodland of over 20,000 square feet in any 12-month period except with the issuance of a building permit, definitive subdivision approval or site plan approval.

Town officials wrote the "clear-cutting" bylaw to prevent the recurrence of what happened in April on the hill at the intersection of Route 9 west and Oak Street. Developer Sam Adams, who has said he plans to construct a mixed-use development on the site, had nearly 19 acres of trees cut down, even though he has none of the necessary permits to begin construction. Some abutters, whose properties Mr. Adams said he wanted to purchase to include in his project, said the developer was vindictive because they opposed the project being so close to their homes.

Selectman Maurice DePalo said the article should not be seen as anti-development, but rather an effort to preserve woodlands until a project is approved.

One town meeting member questioned the effectiveness of the bylaw.

"As written, this is essentially meaningless. If you leave one tree in that 20,000-square-foot area, you're not clearcutting," he said.

Mr. Depalo said the town is not allowed to get much more stringent. He said if the building inspector notices a large amount of trees being cut down, the person would have to stop or demonstrate that they're going to leave some trees.

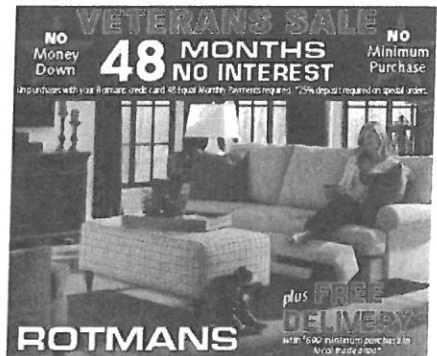
Town meeting also approved a home rule petition to ask the state for an additional liquor license to go to a 45,000-square-foot Whole Foods store that is planned for the Lakeway Commons

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A spokeswoman for Whole Foods said they've received many requests for a store in the Worcester area.

David Katz of Westboro, attorney for the Patel family that owns Turnpike Liquors, asked members to not approve an all-alcohol license for Whole Foods. He said such a license and a proposed large liquor store in the former PetCo building, would take business away from small liquor retailers in the area.

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He said the store's policy around the country is to begin with a license to sell alcohol and expand to serving alcohol at in-store bars and outdoor patios, as well as offer bar-tending training.

A couple of members asked why ask for an additional liquor license for Whole Foods when it could be years before it is constructed. They also said there have been proposed developments that never happened.

Groundbreaking for Lakeway Commons has been put on hold until a lawsuit Mr. Adams filed, alleging the town gave preferential treatment to that project's developer, is resolved.

Town Manager Daniel J. Morgado said town officials feel confident that Lakeway Commons, a substantial project for the town, that is to occupy a very critical location, will be constructed and be very successful. He said investment and other work concerning the project have moved faster than any previous project.

One town meeting member spoke in favor of the liquor license, saying the site really does need to be developed. "I think it will bring a good amount of business to town," she said. "The more competition the better. I don't believe it will take away from other retailers."

Town meeting rejected a citizens' petitioned article that sought a proclamation opposing a proposed natural gas pipeline project that would run through town.

The proposed 125-mile pipeline project that is being developed by National Grid, Eversource Energy and Spectra Energy could go through the western part of town, affecting as many as 400 property owners, and others in Boylston, West Boylston, Sutton, Millbury, Grafton, Upton and Milford.

A representative of the project said 70 percent of the 400 local property owners have already given the company permission to survey their land.

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