



Good evening, my name is Tom Post and I am with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources which owns and manages Biesecker Prairie Nature Preserve. This preserve is located directly south of the parcel where numerous variances are being requested. Biesecker Prairie is a 34.2 acre preserve that was purchased in 1990 and dedicated as a state nature preserve in 1992; such dedication gives the preserve the highest protection under state law.

The prairie is a living museum of natural history showcasing what large sections of central Lake County looked like when first settled. It provides habitat for literally hundreds of plant and animal species including over 175 native plants among which one is listed as federally threatened, five plants that are listed as endangered, threatened or rare in the state, three rare animals, and over 30 rare insects many of which are moths. Because of the minimal amount of prairie left in Indiana and the rarity of the plants and animals on the property the preserve is considered irreplaceable.

Since the state first purchased the property the neighborhood has under gone changes. The state has cooperated with development issues such as relocation of utilities, re-paving of US231, improvements of US 41 going north into St. John. We are amenable to developments such as the bank directly north of the preserve and probably will get along well with the new veterinary office currently being built nearby. We believe we have been good neighbors with the subdivision directly north of the preserve.

However continued proposed development presents additional pressures which brings me here tonight. I am here to speak about the proposed automobile/convenience store/restaurant located directly north of Biesecker Prairie. The parcel is located in the highway 41 overlay district. This is a district where quality and character are important to the community, where aesthetic qualities and high standards for buildings and landscaping are required. These qualities are described in your zoning ordinance for the overlay district. The DNR finds these qualities lacking in the applicant's request.

A review of the 23 variances requested shows serious issues of this request. Starting with the very first variance for a gas station as a special exception and going through the list the applicant is trying to shoehorn in a development not compatible with the neighborhood or your zoning intent. Lot size, building materials, parking, landscaping, lighting, signage; the applicant is asking for multiple variances from your standards.

Specific concerns to the DNR as a neighbor in the area include increased congestion caused by the number of cars potentially using the site. Our concern is increased vehicle accidents caused by the use of fire. We use fire to manage the prairie, we burn a portion every year. Fire causes people to rubber neck at what is going on causing accidents. We know because it has happened on other sites where we burn.

The variances from landscaping requirements such as greenbelt or plantings are concerning as well. Landscaping contributes to controlling water leaving the site, can promote cooling of the area and contributes to the aesthetics of the area. Plantings as called for in your ordinance should be the norm and usage of all native plants should be required, rather than the variances being requested.

There is also a variance request to allow more impervious surface than called for in your ordinance. I believe you are aware that the more a site is made impervious to water the more water runs off the site and since a gas station is being considered with lots of pavement where will the run-off go? and count on contamination being in the water.

The amount of lighting being requested through variance is also problematic and detrimental to the preserve. More and more studies are finding that artificial urban lighting is detrimental to night flying insects particularly moths. Biesecker Prairie has dozens of moth species using the preserve and DNR believes the lighting variances as requested will be directly detrimental to night flying insects.

DNR, as a neighbor to this proposed development also finds the variance requests concerning signage to be excessive and not contributing to the quality of the neighborhood.

There is also a proposed gas station on the southwest corner of US. 41 and US 231. Does the town of St. John want to have two such developments on the doorstep to your town? If the requested variances are approved might this set precedence for other developments in St. John?

In closing the IN Dept. of Natural Resources is not opposed to well planned, well thought out development of this property. We believe there are more compatible developments of this property that would make it more suitable for the neighborhood in terms of aesthetic quality and character while maintaining the high building and landscaping standards the town would like to have. By holding to the standards of your US 41 overlay district this would be helpful in limiting impacts to this important state resource across the street.

The DNR is concerned with congestion of the area, building materials proposed, lack of landscaping, drainage and especially excessive lighting. There is a natural jewel across the street and we request your acknowledgment of this by denying all the variances requested in this petition. Your action on the local level will help protect what is also a state treasure

Thank you for your consideration and if you have any questions I will try and answer them.

Legend



900 ft



Biesecker Prairie

Wicker Blvd

231

W 109th Ave

Schnaider Pl

41

Wicker Ave

Ontario St

Huron St

Google Earth

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