

Shaker Heights approves plans for new CVS Pharmacy

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By Thomas Jewell

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SHAKER HTS. The city Planning Commission signed off last week on design plans for a new CVS Pharmacy at the corner of Chagrin Boulevard and Avalon Road.

Architects involved with the project noted they had presented the plans and their subsequent revisions at nine different meetings in recent months: five appearances before the Shaker Heights Architectural Board of Review, three before the Planning Commission and once in front of City Council.

"We asked the architects to re-think the entire structure as a 'gateway' building," city Planning Director Joyce Braverman said of the process to bring the building in line with other brick architecture along the street, including the city fire station and Huntington Bank.

While the design, which required several variances along with overall site plan approval, has gotten the go-ahead, architects were not clear on when actual construction of the new pharmacy would begin.

The plans call for the demolition of the brick buildings currently housing several businesses, including Sam's Fashion Post, for CVS to build a free-standing pharmacy with a double drive-through.

Once completed, CVS will move out of its current space in the Shaker Towne Centre.

At least five different architects were involved with the plans at various stages over the past few months, and ultimately conceded the current design is "pretty far" from the original drawings, resulting in a store which will have a "unique and customized" appearance.

But Planning Commissioner R. Kevin Madison cast the sole dissenting vote against the design, saying he saw what amounted to too much style and not enough substance.

"When you have an opportunity to do good architecture, you need to take advantage of it," said Madison, an architect. "I don't think they really thought out of the box on this enough. There are an awful lot of 'false' things."

Some of those things, such as fake "dormer"-style windows, were taken out of the plans at the behest of the Planning Commission and the ARB.

Madison had pushed for further attempts to preserve at least part of the existing building, which, though not considered a historic landmark, was considered by planning officials to have some "architectural significance."

"In that area, I think they did a wonderful job of transforming those storefronts, and even the bank," Madison said.

Project engineer and architect John Wojtila noted the existing building's basement caused some design problems, including concerns over federal floodplain regulations.

Braverman said those issues have been resolved to the point where CVS won't have to go with steps or rampways into the store.

A courtyard has also been added, replacing several parking spaces.

"But I also think they needed to push the building back from the street," Madison said.

Architects for CVS disagreed, saying the scale of the building remains intact.

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