

Letters to the editor

Problems seem to follow other problems with Flying J

To the editor,

The tragic accident on M-40 when a tractor trailer pulled out of a truck stop in front of a minivan, killing three members of the Boeve family, was impetus for me to search the Web for articles about litigation involving Flying J Inc., which proposes building a truck stop on 12 acres at Exit 41 in Saugatuck.

I found many more stories than can be shared in this letter, so I chose a series that could be prophetic for the situation in Saugatuck and Laketown townships.

The Winchester Star, an online edition of the Winchester, Va., newspaper, tells of how a Flying J built in Clearbrook, on U.S. 669/Rest Church Road near I-81, required a new six-lane, \$7-million bridge due to traffic and safety issues.

The new bridge opened the door for expansion of Flying J and building a new Mr. Fuel truck stop across the bridge from it. Flying J built adjacent to the 50-member Rest United Methodist Church and a cemetery property.

I have quoted or paraphrased from five articles relating to these developments.

March 30, 2000

A new truck stop in Clearbrook is one step closer to reality today after the State Water Control Board approved Mr. Fuel's wastewater discharge permit.

Ed Butler, chairman of Clearbrook Citizens for Safety (CCS), said it looked as if the board hesitated when he brought up all the problems the Flying J Travel Center had with its package (wastewater control system) treatment plant.

Many Clearbrook residents have rallied against Mr. Fuel as a reaction to problems they say are generated by Flying J. Some of those problems include truck traffic congestion and repeated violations of its wastewater discharge permit. Flying J has made changes to its wastewater system under a consent order with the state Department of Environmental Quality.

After two hours of public comment during its May 26 meeting, the Frederick County Board of Supervisors unanimously tabled rezoning 10.3 acres south of the State Line Exxon convenience center between U.S. 11 and I-81, where Mr. Fuel wants to locate.

Supervisors wanted more information on traffic patterns and accidents on Rest Church Road near the Flying J. The Virginia Department of Transportation said the level of service on the Rest Church bridge over I-81 would receive a failing grade if more truck traffic was added to the mix.

Replacing the bridge is one of the top transportation priorities for

Frederick County. Under the best of circumstances, it would take four years before it could be replaced.

June 20, 2002

The Flying J Travel Plaza in northern Frederick County is facing scrutiny after Tuesday's tractor-trailer accident that killed a Florida woman.

Clearbrook area County Supervisor Lynda Tyler said she receives 15 to 20 calls a day from residents "fearing for their lives" when visiting or passing by the truck stop. "They are visibly shaken, upset and outraged," Tyler said. "That puts the owner of the truck stop in a precarious situation, (because) he's trying to control behavior outside his facility."

Flying J district store support manager Rob Paullin said the truck stop has about 4,500 transactions a day. In Paullin's opinion, the problem at Flying J is traffic, not safety.

"We have a few local residents here who don't want to wait in traffic to get home," he said. "The trucks back up all the way across the bridge sometimes."

Representatives from the county, state police, Flying J, county sheriff's office and CCS met and Tyler was quoted, "We're all concerned. It's a real public safety issue up there."

According to sheriff's statistics, deputies have been called to the truck stop 1,178 times since 1999—primarily for traffic-related matters. Flying J created 153 tractor-trailer parking spaces when it opened and company officials didn't expect such high demand for their use, Paullin said.

Tyler said the spaces are 48 feet long but most tractor-trailers are 53 feet long, which makes it difficult for drivers to maneuver into them.

State police Sgt. Tracy Russilo said traffic in and around the truck stop is heavy. "We have great concerns about that area," she said. "Unless we put someone there 24 hours a day, it's just going to keep backing up."

"To be honest, I'm not sure what the solutions would be," Paullin said. "We'd love to have a larger parking lot, but we can't move backwards. There's no way we can expand our lot."

He said one solution would involve widening the bridge to five lanes, adding this has been planned but not begun.

"The thrust for me is they can do better," Tyler said of Flying J. "They are trying to run, too much volume. If your facility is full, your facility is full."

Aug. 28, 2002

VDOT's construction plans for U.S. 669 at I-81 and U.S. 11 have Flying J officials and area residents concerned. They're pleased with the

planned six-lane bridge and increased length of turning lanes and ramps, but said the proposed car and RV entrance at Flying J will create more problems than good.

"It's a problem that will exist even after the changes," said Kim Dodd, a local resident and member of CCS.

Plans call for the left-turning lane into Flying J to be lengthened along with left-turning lanes onto I-81 northbound and southbound. Normal stacking depth lanes (two turning lanes) won't work because of the road width, so the single turning lanes must be longer to accommodate an increase in traffic and trucks.

The I-81 southbound off ramp will be lengthened 800 feet north. Three additional traffic lights will be installed. The Rest United Methodist Church's entrance on U.S. 669 will be closed and the church will lose at least 12 parking

places and create traffic problems within the lot.

CCS is concerned about school buses getting jammed up in traffic and emergency vehicles not being able to get through.

Jan. 18, 2003

Work continues on a new six-lane bridge over I-81 at Exit 323. Frederick County Supervisor Lynda Tyler said although the project is an inconvenience for drivers, it is necessary.

Safety was the main reason for this bridge replacement, said Tyler. The stress on the current bridge caused by tractor-trailers heading to the Flying J Travel Plaza necessitated the new \$7-million bridge.

Some in the Stonewall District have criticized the project because it could open the door for expansion of Flying J or a new truck stop on the other side of I-81. Mr. Fuel withdrew a proposal for a truck stop in

2002, but the company's president said he would likely re-submit the application. Members of Rest United Methodist Church have complained about losing land in the project.

Dec. 16, 2004

A 55-year-old truck driver from Chicago cut off his penis at the Flying J Truck Stop in Clearbrook—though investigators are not sure how long it happened before rescue crews arrived, Frederick County Sheriff's Office investigators said Wednesday.

Deputies said they arrived Tuesday morning and found the man with blood on his hands. He had been staying in his truck at the Flying J since Friday.

"We believe this incident happened sometime between Friday and Tuesday," Eckman said.

Janet Rund
Saugatuck