

Colleagues: We received an e-mail from Eric today which outlines his concerns regarding the McDonalds Development Plan. In it he mentions the issue I raised re: McDonalds as a Highway Business. As a result I am writing to elaborate my concerns.

At the last meeting Mr. Brugger went through a rather abbreviated and more or less correct history of the evolution of highways in the U.S. The term highway comes from the old English which referred to highways as main roads between towns and villages in medieval England. The term came down to America essentially meaning the same. Thus by the mid-19th century highways generally referred to roads, regardless of size, which connected towns together. The most famous highway in the United States is Highway 1, which almost runs the length of the eastern seaboard of the U.S., from Portland Maine to south of Washington, D.C.

Mr. Brugger made the argument that the word highway came into use in the mid-1950's to refer to major, limited access roads. That is not quite true. Major limited access roads were beginning to be developed in the U.S. in the 1920's and were not necessarily referred to as highways (e.g. the New York State Thruway, the Taconic Parkway, the Blue Ridge Parkway, etc.). The National Defense Highway Act was passed in 1956 and from it has devolved the U.S. Interstate System, limited access highways to be sure, but not the first in the U.S. And, for example, Highway 1 on the eastern seaboard is more or less a stop and go commercial strip for the approximate 500+ miles of its length.

In the Planning jargon, highways became a general term for a major inter or intra-city roads. However, by the 1960's a new word had come into use to describe major intra-city roads—thoroughfare.

Thus, when Brugger began to argue against McDonalds as a Highway Business because it was not necessarily located along an interstate, I turned to the definition of Highway Business in our Zoning Code. It defines a Highway Business as one that is located along or near a major thoroughfare and serves the "motoring public." A thoroughfare is a major "connector" road between significant places within a city or between cities, towns and suburbs. A thoroughfare becomes one based on traffic volume not size of road.

Thus, I believe that both Sawmill Parkway and Powell Road (Olentangy Street; Ohio 750), from its origins near Westerville to its terminus at Ohio --- constitute thoroughfares. The McDonalds site is 600 yards (1800 feet) from the corner of Powell Road and Sawmill Parkway. It is located on one thoroughfare and close to the intersection of another and 60 percent or more of its business is drive-thru (sic) business (by McDonalds own analysis). Therefore, I believe that under our zoning code, at the site chosen by McDonalds, the business constitutes a Highway Business.

Without a drive-thru (sic) and/or if it were located say north of the downtown near the fire station or in the middle of Rutherford Rd. between Sawmill and Liberty it probably could not be classified as a highway business. In short its classification depends on its design (no drive-thru [sic]) and/or, and most importantly, its location! Even more important to me, in geographers jargon, is its "relative location:" the location of a

function with respect to the location of all other functions surrounding it, the highway(s) its located on and the impact it has on these surrounding locations.

Which brings me to my next set of concerns. When this proposal first came to us as a sketch plan I expressed my reservations about it at that location: (1) it is sited at just the point Powell Road begins to narrow towards the downtown. At that location regardless of the traffic engineers study, increased traffic generated there (increased “in and out” movement; increased left and right hand turns which now do not exist) will create more problems than they resolve; (2) the residential neighborhood to the south will increasingly become a cut-through passage to reach this site and or exit this site. And, this is regardless of the traffic study. They (the traffic engineers) cannot predict this (cut-through) and we all know intuitively what people will do re: traffic congestion. To avoid it we will try to go around it, even if it means driving at a slower speed; and (3) the impact on the park. As a member of Park and Rec stated to me Saturday (mad as hell because I will vote against this proposal), people using Handels “already trash the park. “So, McDonalds can’t make it much worse than it already is.” I find this type of argument ludicrous. The argument is that since there is already a problem, making the problem worse is no big deal. I believe adding a McDonalds to that site is going to make the problem worse and is detrimental to the park and the quality of life in that neighborhood.

Obviously, I believe we should reject this preliminary plan on the basis of the concerns I have outlined. I also know that we must tell McDonalds how they may conform to the code and/or our concerns. In my view the primary way they can conform is to remove the drive-thru (sic), block off access to the park by McDonald’s customers (I do not know how to do this) and prevent motorists from cutting through the residential neighborhood to access McDonalds (I do not know how do this either). This is a proposed use in the wrong location!

Dick Fusch

Dr. Richard Fusch
Professor of Geography
Director, Urban Studies Program
Ohio Wesleyan University
rdfusch@owu.edu
740-368-3616