

Pilot Travel Center headed to the west end

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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The city is stepping on the gas for a new Pilot Travel Center to open on the west side.

The Planning Commission and City Council have voted to allow an unusual arrangement – considering a location cobbled together among three different properties on Highway 66 at Rico Street.

The change means that Land Development Standards like setbacks regard the properties as one lot. Applied individually, the rules would devote much more of the proposed property to setbacks and landscaping.

“This would effectively create a 30 - 35 feet strip across the middle of the proposed site on which no structures could be located,” according to a staff report. Pretty much everyone agreed that isn’t practical.

Pilot has 40-year leases with the other property owners, Elizabeth D. Marra and Rico Land and Cattle, so the project is expected to be around for a long time. The city actions require that if Pilot shuts the station, the company must return the properties to pre-Pilot conditions.

One observer noted that as the country shifts to electric vehicles, fuel demand may change over that time. Jack Rymer, Pilot’s Project Manager, Construction Development, said the company is evaluating which stations in its national network will offer EV charging. The nearest existing

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location is about 20 miles away in Jamestown.

The Gallup location would be in the company's One9 format, which caters to small trucking fleets. If all goes well, construction will begin next spring.

The project also raised questions about the size and height of signs for the station. The former height limit was 50 feet; the city will allow signs of up to 100 feet tall and 650 sq. ft. area in a corridor along Highway 66. Some signs on that stretch are already bigger than that, but they've been in place for a long time and were grandfathered in as nonconforming uses when the Land Development Standards were changed.

For Pilot, the issue was having signs that are visible to I-40 travelers moving both directions in time for them to get off the highway and shop there.

"It's designed to get a motorist's attention as they travel through Gallup so they will stop and spend money and enjoy our city," Rymer said. "For eastbound travelers, there's a hill. Not only does the exit itself rise, but the topography rises."

Councilor Fran Palochak, whose District 4 includes the development site, is glad for an anchor development there.

"I have tried to get an anchor on the west side. It is blighted. Businesses are closing almost every day. I now learn the schools are going to be putting housing over there," she said. "To have this travel center would just bring us back to life."

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