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LOCAL

## Gig Harbor Fred Meyer project moving forward

By Brynn Grimley

*Staff writer*

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The former Fife RV site sits vacant while permitting plans for six commercial buildings totaling 173,472 square feet work their way through the city of Gig Harbor permitting process. The city hearing examiner recently approved the project at 5500 Point Fosdick Drive. BRYNN GRIMLEY *Staff writer*

Work crews can finally start moving dirt on land in Gig Harbor planned for several years to hold a Fred Meyer store, gas station and family fun complex on the west side of state Route 16.

Gig Harbor hearing examiner Stephen Causseaux, Jr. has approved site, design and landscape plans filed by WWR Properties, a University Place development company.

The approval issued Aug. 12 allows for clearing, grading and extending utilities to the former Fife RV site. Building permits are still needed for construction.

“If everything stays on track, you'll probably see ground breaking there in the next four to five months,” said Gig Harbor senior city planner Peter Katich.

But before the shopping center called Olympic Towne Center can open, a series of traffic revisions is required.

They include:

- Completing a new access road to the shopping complex. The city will widen and connect 32nd Avenue NW from 56th Street NW to the intersection of 50th Street CT NW and Olympic Drive. The new road will come out in the Heritage Bank parking lot at the lighted intersection of 50th Street and Olympic Drive.
- Adding a right turn lane from eastbound Olympic to southbound Point Fosdick drives. The city of Gig Harbor will contribute 45 percent of the cost and acquire the right of way from Chevron.
- Creating a second left turn lane from northbound Point Fosdick to westbound Olympic by allowing drivers to turn left from the existing through lane.
- Improve traffic signal timing to accommodate the reconfigured Olympic-Point Fosdick intersection.

In his approval, Causseaux also stipulated that the developer work with the Washington State Department of Transportation to ease impacts to the highway on and off ramps at Olympic Drive.

Describing the impacts as minor, Causseaux said any improvements would come at the “sole discretion” of WSDOT.

State transportation officials said last week they don’t anticipate making changes to the overpass or its ramps at this time.

Causseaux’s decision was a blow to resident-led Citizens for the Preservation of Gig Harbor, which is concerned about traffic in the [already congested area](#).

“Our issue was never really with the development,” said Gig Harbor resident Jeni Woock. “Our issue has always been about the traffic.”

Woock leads the group and appealed Causseaux's approval of the project last month.

Her main complaint: The intersection at Olympic and Point Fosdick cannot handle the additional traffic a new commercial development will bring.

The project will add six buildings totaling 173,472 square feet of commercial space to 16.47 acres.

That includes a 64,000-square-foot Fred Meyer, 14-stall Fred Meyer gas station, a 57,000-square-foot family fun center with a bowling alley and arcade, plus a 13,000-square-foot PetSmart and three other buildings.

An estimated 589 new car trips will come to the area between 4 and 6 p.m., according to an independent traffic study done last year.

Woock questioned the city's method for analyzing traffic. She argued cars wait longer to move through the intersection than the city has reported.

Causseaux cited a lack of evidence to support Woock's claim and denied her appeal in early August.

City planners hope improvements laid out by Causseaux will improve traffic flow around the growing Uptown area of Gig Harbor.

"It is unbalanced at this intersection, but it is not so far unbalanced that we need to reassess how we look at the problem," said Jeff Langhelm, Gig Harbor Public Works director.

Plans for the current Fred Meyer building on the other side of the highway aren't known. A company spokeswoman did not return a reporter's calls or emails.

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