

Carters' land development may be prohibited by new ordinance

By Karen Henderson
Staff Writer

It seemed as if the members of Maury L. Carter & Associates, Inc. were getting their own verse for the Alanis Morissette song, "Isn't It Ironic" at a Clermont City Council workshop last Monday night.

The Carters, Maury and son Daryl, donated parcels of the company's land holdings for the new South Lake campus of Lake-Sumter Community College as well as for the new South Lake Hospital.

But recently the two have been hitting brick walls while attempting to develop adjacent, but less geographically workable, parcels of land.

"It's kind of frustrating for us that we donated the flatter, more easily developable land, and kept the more challenging parcels that now we may not even be able to develop," Daryl Carter lamented at Monday's workshop.

In question Monday evening were land parcels on the southeast corner of State Road 50 and Hancock Road and the northeast corner of the same intersection. The city's still-in-the-works grading ordinance could severely restrict, or even prohibit, the Carters' development of the two sites.

The Carters are trying to develop the four-acre site on the southeast corner for a 7-11. At a previous Clermont Council meeting, Daryl Carter was told

that because of the traffic dangers at that intersection, the parcel would have to be right-in, right-out access only. Carter agreed, and also agreed to donate the right-of-way at the southernmost part of the intersection for the continuation of the future Hook Street east of Hancock.

Part of the challenge to developing the land is that there was no grading ordinance in place years ago when the state cut through the hill in that area to build 50, and then again later to build Hancock. Hancock also has what some consider a dangerous drop on northbound Hancock near 50.

Under consideration now is a plan to lower Hancock south of 50 approximately 10 to 12 feet. But the county has already agreed to move the Hook St. intersection further south on Hancock for traffic safety purposes.

The Carters' engineer said Monday that the measurement from the road to the top of the property potentially being developed is 24 feet, which would require exceeding the 10-foot cut limit allowed by the current grading ordinance language. Enforcing the current ordinance would render the four-acre site undevelopable.

At the northeast corner of the intersection, the Carters are planning an 185,000 square-foot retail project, which is not within

See **CARTER** page 2

Page 2

CARTER

From Page 1

the parameters of the current 100,000 square-foot retail limit, but the proposed project was also reported to require extensive cut and fill to put that size development on it.

Daryl Carter said Monday that there was a retailer interested in the site, but chose not to reveal the specifics. However, he added that it was a retailer that Clermont residents had already expressed an interest in.

"You're making a choice in telling these folks not to come to Clermont," Carter explained at Monday's workshop. He added that he was against the 100,000 square-foot ordinance at the time it was passed, and that he told the council that it was closing the door to several retailers in passing the ordinance.

Mayor Hal Turville explained his concern about the [more than 100,000 square foot] "abandoned big box locations" that he says can be found "a few miles down the road if you drive north, south, east or west." Turville said he is concerned that when large retailers want to expand, they build bigger buildings and abandon the smaller ones, which have few alternate uses and become community eyesores.

But developing the site will be another issue, depending on the final language of the grading ordinance.

"There is no way to develop the property for retail use without grading the property," Daryl Carter said.

Fortunately for the Carters, city officials want to figure out a mutually satisfying solution.

City Manager Wayne Saunders recognized the contributions of the Carters.

"Because of the vision of the Carters, the property is much better now than it could have been," Saunders said.

City Engineer Tamara Richardson said that she is working with the grading ordinance language to try to find a compromise with the Carters.

Richardson said she has been researching other grading ordinances, and trying to adapt them to Clermont's unique situation.

"Georgia deals with the grading of rocky areas, and California has the mudslides, and of course, our side is we want to protect the hills," Richardson explained. "But I think we'll be able to work something out to allow them [Carters] to work their site while still maintaining the topography."