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Riverview neighborhood seeks zoning change to allow storage of carnival equipment

By Shelley Rossetter, Times Staff Writer

Residents seek a zoning overlay to permit keeping carnival equipment at home.

RIVERVIEW - Semi-trucks filled with carnival rides and games, ticket booths on wheels, camping trailers parked in the back yard.

No this isn't Gibsonton. It's Tropical Acres, a subdivision less than 10 miles to the southeast. Like Gibsonton, Tropical Acres is home to many in the carnival business, some who store their equipment there during the off-season.

The difference? Tropical Acres isn't zoned for that kind of storage.

Some property owners want to change that.

If approved by the county, a show business overlay would keep Tropical Acres' current agricultural and residential zoning but also allow owners of the 39 involved properties to store semi-trucks, trailers and equipment. The zoning overlay also would allow camping trailers to hook up to water and electricity for temporary use. The approval process could take months.

Surrounded by neighborhoods where homeowner's associations make decisions on details such as mailbox sizes and fences, the proposed zoning overlay doesn't sit well with everyone.

More than 100 people, most who live in neighboring subdivisions, have written to the county in protest.

"This would further erode our property values," said Sally Reid, who lives in Summer Springs to the west. "Less businesses and less residents would want to live here."

It's a case of two different views on how a neighborhood should be run, county zoning administrator Joe Moreda said earlier this week during a tour of the neighborhood given by the applicants.

"HOAs are trying to regulate where to put a satellite dish," Moreda said, "and in this community, there's more of a live and let live philosophy."

Despite being a violation of county code, the storage that would be allowed by the zoning overlay is already taking place in the neighborhood, Moreda said.

Many of the violations belong to people not in show business or the carnival industry, said John Arnold, owner of Arnold Amusements and seven properties in Tropical Acres.

"I'm not the only one out there," said Arnold, noting that he's seen campers and tractor trailers in some of his neighbors' yards. "I'm trying to be legal, to do it the right way, so I don't have to leave."

Crime is what worries Jim Petosky, the director of the Shadow Run Homeowners Association, a subdivision that borders Tropical Acres to the north.

"We're going to have transients back there," he said. "There's a lot of trash back there and always gun shots."

Currently, crime in Tropical Acres is no higher than crime in neighboring subdivisions, said Steve Launikitis, the District 4 captain of the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

"There have been shootings, there have been drug arrests, but there have also been those crimes in other areas as well," he said.

Petosky fears those crimes may increase if commissioners eventually approve the zoning overlay.

"If we go ahead and do this, it's going to get worse," he said.

It's the people who are not involved in show business that are giving the neighborhood a bad reputation, said Tropical Acres resident Lynne Florian.

Florian became part of the zoning overlay application to show her support. Her property is grandfathered in from a movement in the 1970s to allow some properties to store show business equipment, but she supports making it easier for others.

"A lot of those people that don't take care of their property aren't show people," Florian said. "Most of the show people care about their property and their equipment."

Florian, whose husband used to work in show business, stores several carnival games and a semi-trailer in her yard.

This isn't the first time a show business overlay has been attempted in this area. In 2008, Arnold asked the county to place the overlay on two of his properties. The county rejected it because it didn't meet the criteria necessary, and there was a lack of similar applicants in the area, county records show.

Richard Bennett, a real estate broker representing the applicants, thinks this time will be different.

"Most of these people have been here with their equipment for between five and 25 years," he said. "This isn't something new that has just sprung up."

Bennett says 500 people signed a petition in support of the latest application. When asked to provide the petition to a reporter, he declined, but added that the list includes the Showmen's Association in Gibsonton and numerous churches and businesses.

Despite the large number of people Bennett says back the proposal, there are more than 100 who have written into the county to express concern.

Approving this "will turn it into another Gibsonton, I'm afraid," said Reid, who lives near Tropical Acres. "And

we didn't buy into Riverview to live right across from that."

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if you go

Zoning hearing

A hearing is scheduled for 6 p.m. Dec. 12 on the second floor of the County Center at 601 E Kennedy Blvd. For information, contact the county at (813) 276-2006.

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