



## The Republican.

### Agawam approves retail limits

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AGAWAM - The City Council has approved tougher guidelines on proposed retail developments that will likely prevent the construction of any project similar in scope to the Agawam Pavilion proposal that voters rejected in November.

The guidelines, approved unanimously in the form of an amendment to the city's zoning by-laws, ban the construction of any shopping center in the city larger than 100,000 square feet.

The guidelines also require at least five acres for any shopping center and make it mandatory that any building lot used for shopping must have no more than 35 percent of its acreage taken up by a building.

The passage of the amendment was hailed as progress by members of the council and Planning Board and the leading group opposed to the Pavilion, a 563,000-square-foot shopping center eyed for land off Tennis Road that voters rejected by a 3-to-2 margin in November.

Gina M. Letellier, chairman of the council's zoning review committee, said the cap on future projects gives developers guidelines, and protects the city from a builder acquiring large tracts of land to build massive, regional shopping centers.

"This lets builders know, if it's bigger than 100,000 square feet, don't bother applying," Letellier said.

But Mayor Richard A. Cohen and Fay A. Borgatti, chairwoman of Citizens in Favor of Retail, questioned yesterday if the cap on the building size will affect future retail growth.

"The council is the law-making body in the city, and we will live with what they passed," Cohen said. "I just hope it doesn't have a negative impact on future positive economic development in our community."

After an hour-long debate by the council on Monday, the cap on the building size was reduced from 140,000 square feet, which the Planning Board had proposed, to 100,000 square feet.

Councilors were largely divided on the issue. Some said they would vote for the amendment to set guidelines, but didn't think 100,000 square feet was enough. Others advocated lowering the cap to 80,000 square feet.

Councilor George Bitzas eventually called for a compromise, and the amendment was passed with the cap set at 100,000 square feet. Ten members of Citizens Against Reckless Development, the group which opposed the Pavilion project, stood and applauded after the vote.

Borgatti, whose group did not attend meetings on the issue, said she has been in touch with National Retail Development Corp., the firm that proposed the Pavilion, and expects it to unveil another proposal soon.

Karl A. Merriam, CARD president, and Mark H. Robbins, managing director for National Realty, could not be reached for comment.

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