

## LOCAL NEWS

# Sheetz proposal for Royal Oak to be debated next week

Popular chain received approval in Highland Township, but some communities have rejected company



If approved by Royal Oak officials, Sheetz would replace a vacant industrial building at the intersection of 14 Mile and Coolidge roads. (MEDIANEWS GROUP PHOTO)



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The Sheetz convenience store chain announced plans last year to bring 50 to 60 locations to Michigan in the next six years. The company has faced opposition by residents in many communities.

One of them could be coming to the north end of Royal Oak at the Birmingham border.

Royal Oak's planning commission is hosting a public hearing at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11, at City Hall, 203 S. Troy St. to consider a Sheetz proposal.

The company is asking to redevelop the former MacLean-Fogg Component site at 3200 W. 14 Mile Road, near Coolidge Highway, next to Clover Hill Park Cemetery. The site would include a storage area for cemetery supplies, a car wash and a drive-through and outdoor cafe attached to the Sheetz store. But Sheetz needed the trustees' special-use approval to put in the gas pumps.

Sheetz opened its first Michigan location in Romulus near the Detroit Metro Airport in August. Since then Fraser, Warren, Eastpointe, Taylor, and Macomb, Chesterfield and Ypsilanti townships have approved Sheetz's plans.

Waterford Township and Rochester Hills residents objected to Sheetz proposals last year and the Pennsylvania-based company dropped those plans.

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In May, Madison Heights City Council rejected Sheetz’s special land-use request for a location in light of residents’ objections.

Farmington Hills city council approved one of two Sheetz proposals. The council rejected a plan for a 24-hour gas station, convenience store and restaurant with a drive-through window at 12 Mile and Middlebelt roads last month. In December, the planning commission approved a different plan, for a Sheetz at Grand River Avenue and Middlebelt Road. That plan requires a final site plan approval before it can move forward. The city’s zoning board of appeals would have to approve any variance requests, but can send some requests back to the planning commission to review zoning rules.

Sheetz is also causing waves in Highland Township, where trustees unanimously voted to approve a special-use request from Sheetz on Monday – but not before listening to the concerns of dozens of residents.

The gas retailer plans to build on a site that covers an entire block bounded by M-59, Milford Road, Ruggles Road and John Street. Three long-vacant buildings stand on the site. The township’s historic train depot is tucked behind them.

Residents were divided between supporters and opponents. Supporters want food and fuel options for people who work afternoon and evening shifts. Opponents worry about crime, the availability of alcohol, bright

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Jodi Bingham moved to Highland seven years ago. She opposed Sheetz in part because she's become friendly with many of the community's small-business owners.

"I believe Sheetz would utterly take out the heart of Highland and destroy small businesses," she said.

Sheetz is able to drop gas prices significantly on key travel days, she said, citing a 2024 summer holiday discount when the company sold gas for less than \$2 a gallon – a move small business owners can't afford.

Bruce Reisinger supported Sheetz but said he understood concerns about a 24-hour operation. He said being open around the clock would benefit people, including police officers, who want to pick up food for a night-shift meal break or on the way to or from work. He said many businesses sell alcohol nearby and Sheetz would not make a difference.

"Why do we have to just stop our growth here because someone is afraid someone else will buy alcohol and drive a motorcycle?" he said.

Township Supervisor Rick Hamill said he ran a small business for years and had to operate differently after Lowe's and Home Depot came to the area.

"This little downtown has a lot of problems. It can't grow. It can't develop," he said, explaining that without a sewer system, retailers wouldn't come to the township. "That's not a cost anyone wants to eat. I'm not jumping up and down about having another gas station."

He urged people to consider the cost of developing the site and said if a group of residents wanted, they were welcome to make an offer to Isaac Hanna, the property owner.

Hanna said he's had the land for 30 years and tried to bring restaurants or other retail attractions to the site.

"Believe me folks, not having the sewers and the water? That's why it's the way it is," Hanna said. "Make me an offer of \$4 million to \$4.5 million and I'll make a deal with you all."

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Hanna said the Sheetz deal includes installing a water line to Highland Elementary School, a \$500,000 project, and creating a replica of the train depot at Veterans Park, at an estimated cost of \$250,000. The pavers and lighting will be reused by the township. Other elements of the work include a sidewalk, a public sewer, and some storm sewer connections.

Hanna said Sheetz will likely invest between \$8 and \$9 million to develop the site and add significant landscaping. The gas station will have seven pumps, a restaurant and drive-through with a small outdoor cafe. The 6,000-square-foot building will feature a mansard roof to better match the township's existing buildings — making it unique among more than 800 other Sheetz sites. Sheetz agreed to limit light pollution with shades that aim lighting downward.

Hamill said the site plan shows that Sheetz would use less space than the three vacant buildings now on the site, which have a combined size of 20,000 square feet.

Highland Township's planning commission recommended approving an unrelated gas station proposal from West Bloomfield businessman Sarmed Raouf of RIMA Properties. His gas station site is on the northeast corner of North Milford and East Wardlow roads. Final site approval depends on certain conditions:

- limiting hours from 5 a.m. to midnight.
- that the company's state-required pollution liability coverage is adequate or to negotiate a greater amount if needed and
- a multi-step site plan process that includes a preliminary site plan and tentative approvals from all involved agencies before approving a final site plan.

This gas station will have six pumps under a canopy and a 4,500-square-foot building. After the trustees unanimously approved the special use request, Hamill said, "No more gas stations. Please."

During Monday's meeting, Hamill addressed residents' complaints on social media about meeting notices. He said the law requires public

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“It costs \$10,000 to mail a notice to every township resident,” he said, adding that all meeting plans are published on the township’s website, where people can sign up for automatic notifications. The township has Facebook and YouTube pages with information and meeting videos. He invited residents to email, call or visit the township hall if they had questions about development or other issues.

The township’s Zoom meetings are recorded. The videos are typically posted to YouTube within 24 hours, barring any technical issues, which on Monday included some inconsistent sound quality

The township’s YouTube is here: [youtube.com/@chartertownshipofhighlandm2527](https://youtube.com/@chartertownshipofhighlandm2527).

The annual joint meeting of township trustees, planning commissioners, zoning board of appeals members and Highland Downtown Development Authority officials is at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025.

— Oakland Press reporter Anne Runkle contributed to this story.

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