

## OLD SEMINOLE HEIGHTS

## Neighbors give approving nod to proposed Starbucks

■ The chain could open a coffee shop, complete with drive-through, at a former gas station site if the city approves.

By MICHAEL CANNING  
Times Correspondent

Pretend you're the Tampa City Council, Randy Baron told fellow members of the Old Seminole Heights Neighborhood Association. How many would vote nay, he asked.

Only one raised a hand. And so it was decided. OSHNA wants Starbucks.

If only it were as simple as association president Baron's mock vote. But Monday's night meeting between neighbors and a third-party developer for a proposed Starbucks at the northeast corner of Hillsborough and Central Avenues was an amenable early step.

Bill Chalmers, the developer, assured the group's members at the Seminole Garden Center. "We're not interested in going into areas where the neighbors don't want us." But a generally positive response from Seminole Heights residents has greeted Chalmers' plans in recent months. The meeting only sharpened the neighbors' enthusiasm for turning a former gas station site into a coffee shop.

"I think a lot of people in the neighborhood are looking forward to Starbucks coming in," association member Jeff Harmon said.

Chalmers and urban planner Linda Pearson presented a proposed site plan and renderings of the coffee shop.

The plans depicted an 1,800-square-foot building, featuring a raised portico supported by columns, an architectural nod to the porch columns prevalent in the surrounding neighborhood.

The site plan also showed a two-lane drive-through, a patio with outdoor seating, and entrances on Central and Hillsborough Avenues.

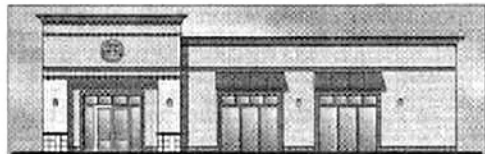
Most of the group responded positively to the plans, but some raised concerns about the parking lot fronting the property. Historically, commercial buildings have been built at the front of lots in urban areas.

Chalmers, who intends to buy the property from ExxonMobil and lease it to Starbucks for 10 years, said he hopes construction will begin in early spring. But there are some hurdles to clear.

The city must approve the drive-through, and the Architectural Review Commission must agree that the building's design will conform with the neighborhood's historic flavor.

Chalmers, whose Pursuit Development Company specializes in redeveloping former gas station sites for Starbucks and other companies, mentioned one potential deal breaker. He said Starbucks insists on being able to use two old poles that tower over the site. The poles once held the Mobil sign aloft, and would make the Seattle-based coffee chain's sign visible to motorists on nearby Interstate 275.

However, historic preservation rules and city zoning laws may prohibit using the poles for a sign again. But the pro-Starbucks neighborhood association members hope their clout with the city government will help clear the way. In recent years the group has been instrumental in



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blocking the development of a Walgreens, a car wash and a Krystal restaurant.

The car wash and Krystal were pro-

An artist's rendering shows the style of the proposed Starbucks.

posed for the would-be Starbucks site.

Seminole Heights resident Louis Klar said he hopes his neighbors' enthusiasm for Starbucks won't fade.

"I've lived in the neighborhood for 60 years," he said, "and I know when there's compromise, the neighborhood thrives. When that compromise goes away, the neighborhood dies."

Board member Steve Gluckman voted "nay" to the Starbucks during the mock vote. He said he's not

impressed with the proposed plans.

"We're looking at a project that was designed for a shopping mall parking lot," he said. "We can do better than that."

Gluckman said he is not opposed to Starbucks, but that Chalmers hasn't provided enough details yet to win his approval. He said he's worried there is

enough desire for the coffee shop make people willing to accept a project.