



Kushner Companies has dropped its bid for county approval to build a 1 million-square foot, Amazon-type distribution facility just west of the turnpike and north of Atlantic Avenue in unincorporated Delray Beach. GREG LOVETT/PALM BEACH POST

Kushner Companies pulls application for massive warehouse west of Delray

Community groups had argued that project was too big, too dense

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Kushner Companies, affiliated with Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of former President Trump, has withdrawn its application for a massive 1-million-square-foot warehouse west of Delray Beach.

There was intense opposition to the warehouse from south county community groups, who argued that the project was too big and too dense for the region and would make intolerable traffic conditions even worse on West Atlantic Avenue.

The Amazon-type distribution facility would have been built on a 51-acre parcel west of Florida's Turnpike in the Agricultural Reserve, a special zone created to limit development and protect farming. The tract eyed by Kushner Companies extends from Starkey Road east toward the Turnpike. The project was named Star Key.

The withdrawal marks the second time in the past year that plans in southern Palm Beach County for a proposed warehouse facility fell apart because of community opposition and traffic concerns. Last May, the Village of Golf Council killed a plan for an Amazon last-mile facility.

Kushner Companies saw the west Delray location as ideal for a distribution center as it bordered on Florida's Turnpike and offered easy access to State Road 7 and Interstate 95.

Two major civic organizations, the Delray Alliance of Residential Associations and the Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations (COBWRA), were strongly opposed to the project. Both organizations were expected to testify against it at public hearings.

The county relies on the two civic groups to review development plans. Their recommendations carry some weight with the County Commission, which would have had the final say.

While the project was within the jurisdiction of the Delray Alliance, COBWRA also took a position, claiming the massive warehouse operation would have had a negative impact on the entire region.

If approved, Star Key would have become the single largest commercial/industrial project ever built in the Ag Reserve, a 20,000-acre zone in southern Palm Beach County designed to preserve agriculture and prevent over-development.

The Post made numerous attempts to seek comment from Kushner Companies as to why the application was withdrawn and whether it intends to file a new one. Calls were not returned.

The silence was in sharp contrast to when the

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Warehouse

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company first revealed its intentions in January 2021. Laurent Morali, president of Kushner Companies, told The Post then that he was confident that he could overcome the concerns of area residents and looked forward to working with them.

The company sought to change the zoning from agricultural to industrial.

Morali said that he had not yet obtained a company to build the warehouse but was confident he would be able to secure one that needed a distribution center in Palm Beach County.

According to the county property appraiser's office, the owner of the site continues to be Morningstar Nursery of Palm Beach. It has operated a nursery there since 1984, when it bought the land for \$689,000. Its current market value is \$5.2 million but Kushner Companies was expected to pay much more than that if it bought the property.

"The magnitude of this regional distribution center indicates that the services proposed are not primarily for the residents of the Agricultural Reserve," the Alliance said in a press release. The organization noted that it could take as long as nine years for the widening of Atlantic Avenue to occur, and that the highway, already over-capacity, could not accommodate the scores of trucks from a warehouse operation.

"It appears they realized it was going to be very difficult for them to obtain approval."

Lori Vinikoor

Delray Alliance of Residential Associations president, on Kushner Companies withdrawing plans for a massive warehouse in the Ag Reserve

Alliance President Lori Vinikoor told The Post that her organization was working with the development firm to see what concessions could be made to make the project palatable. But those discussions ended long ago, she said.

"It appears they realized it was going to be very difficult for them to obtain approval," she said.

COBWRA President Beth Rappaport told county commissioners the Star Key proposal is "contrary to the very rules designed to protect (the Ag Reserve) and ensure its preservation for generations to come."

Like the Alliance, COBWRA noted that "one of the cornerstones of the Ag Reserve" has always been that any development should, first and foremost, benefit the residents who call it home. And this project, the letter said, fails to do that.

Something is expected to be built on the parcel as it is one of few remaining large undeveloped tracts along West Atlantic Avenue.