

Olive Garden Mulls Opening City Location

Eatery, Krispy Kreme Eye East Market Street

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HARRISONBURG — Olive Garden could be coming to a redeveloped corner of East Market and Burgess streets, a project that might include a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop.

Randy Harman, principal broker with Harman Realty, said Wednesday afternoon that the company has been in “lengthy discussions” with Darden Restaurants about putting the popular Italian chain at the intersection near the Interstate 81 off-ramp.

To make way for the restaurant and parking, the Best Western Harrisonburg Inn at the site would be demolished.

Olive Garden has filed preliminary plans with the city for review by fire officials. City engineer Daniel Rublee said a traffic impact analysis also is being prepared for Olive Garden.

Harman cautioned that the talks and submission of plans don’t mean the restaurant long sought by many residents is destined for the site. “We have not officially entered into a signed lease agreement with Darden as of yet,” he said. “Obviously, they’ve filed some paperwork with the city about a project that is potentially happening.”

Jessica Dinon, manager of public relations and communications for Olive Garden, confirmed in an email Wednesday afternoon the restaurant chain is interested in the Harrisonburg market.

“We are exploring several locations for new Olive Garden restaurants,” she wrote, “including the Harrisonburg area.”

Krispy Kreme is closer to happening, but Harman said it also isn’t certain.

“We have officially entered into a lease agreement with Krispy Kreme to build on the corner of Market and Burgess where the old Shoney’s restaurant used to be,” he said. “They’re in their due diligence period, so it’s not a done deal.”

Krispy Kreme corporate communications officials did not return multiple inquiries about its local plans over the past week. The company’s website includes an advertisement for a general manager for a Harrisonburg store.

No Final Plans Yet

Harman Properties LLC, a division of the Harman family’s operations, owns the land at the intersection.

Rublee said Harrisonburg has potential businesses submit predesign drawings for fire review. The review provides engineers with information needed to design a building and site plan so city firefighters could battle a blaze effectively.

Any final plans that might be submitted for Olive Garden are months away, he said.

“Obviously, this is very preliminary,” said Rublee. “I don’t know where they are in terms of submitting final designs.”

The plans submitted for the projects show the potential Olive Garden building at 7,757 square feet and the potential Krispy Kreme at 3,050 square feet.

Harman said the Best Western was built about 28 years ago, and a family company owns and operates the franchise. The Harmans would look for a new location for the inn if the Olive Garden comes to fruition.

“For the current Olive Garden plan to move forward, the hotel would have to come down,” he said. “That said, we’ve spent a lot of time working on where we could potentially move the hotel, but we haven’t made any decisions about that so far.”

No official announcements have been made to hotel employees, Harman said.

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