



**STAFF REPORT**  
**WEST ALLIS PLAN COMMISSION**  
**WEDNESDAY, January 24, 2018**  
**6:00 PM**  
**ROOM 128 – CITY HALL – 7525 W. GREENFIELD AVE.**

- 3. Site, Landscaping and Architectural Plans for proposed site and building changes to a portion of the West Allis Towne Centre located at 6822-6900 W. Greenfield Ave. submitted by Ross Gallentine of Ramco Gershenson, property owner (Tax Key No. 439-0001-007).

**Overview and Zoning**

The West Allis Towne Centre is located at the intersection of S. 70 and W. Greenfield Ave. along the 70<sup>th</sup> St. corridor. This corridor is a gateway to the City of West Allis with access to Interstate 94. The shopping centers location is situated within an area including the Six Points Redevelopment area, Summit Place Office Center and Downtown West Allis. Like the Six Points area, the Towne Centre is considered an extension of the City's Downtown commercial district.

Historically, what is now the Towne Centre properties, were part of the Allis Chalmers complex. With the departure of Allis Chalmers in the mid 1980's the Towne Centre was built.

During this time the City lost one of its largest employers, jobs and thereby shifting the tax burden from industry to residential. The City code at the time didn't offer the same design review requirements. The former Kmart building was constructed in 1988. Unfortunately, the Kmart building was built with its back-side to existing street frontages and the intersection of S. 70 St. and W. Greenfield Ave.

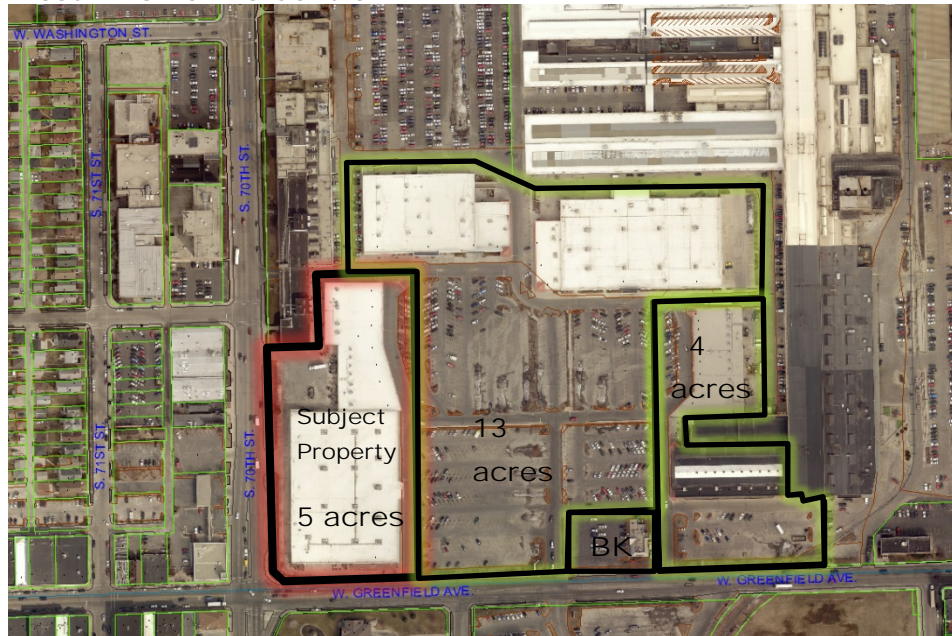


A dated layout – The existing building layout is a problem. As built, in 1988 (30 years ago), this portion of the Towne Centre property has faced the backside of its retail stores toward the major intersection of S. 70 St. and W. Greenfield Ave., blocking any connectivity between the downtown and the shopping center. Commercial development designed in modern times would be not designed to have the back side of stores with service and utility areas (loading and trash) face a key intersection and a City's downtown.

While part of the Towne Centre property has benefited from more recent site and architectural improvements since 2007, the subject 5 acre lot, including the now vacant Kmart space, has not changed.

In 2007, the City helped finance Ramco-Gershenson's proposal to reposition the center with new tenants. This inspired the opportunity to create an ingress/egress linkage north south through the shopping center, to connect the Summit Place office complex to W. Greenfield Ave. The improvements also promoted a safer, more pedestrian-friendly development connected to transit and surround areas. Unfortunately, the subject property was not part of the overall update.

## West Allis Towne Centre



With the vacancy of the Kmart tenant space, Ramco-Gershenson Inc., the applicant/property owner, is proposing to re-tenant an 86,479-sf portion of the building located at 6900 W. Greenfield Ave. The former Kmart tenant space is proposed to be divided up into 3 parts/tenant spaces (including Hobby Lobby and two other retail spaces).

The site is part of the West Allis Towne Centre development, which in total consists of approximately 22.5 acres over 4 parcels of land. The Kmart space, the subject property of this review, is located at the corner of S. 70 St. and W. Greenfield Ave. and is situated upon about 5 acres of land.

### Surrounding context

Given the urban context of this area, it is very walkable setting along both W. Greenfield Ave. and S. 70 St. The area is serviced by public transit (including Milwaukee County Transit and Bublr bicycle share) and is located near many large corporate, institutional and retail commercial uses nearby within a short walk.

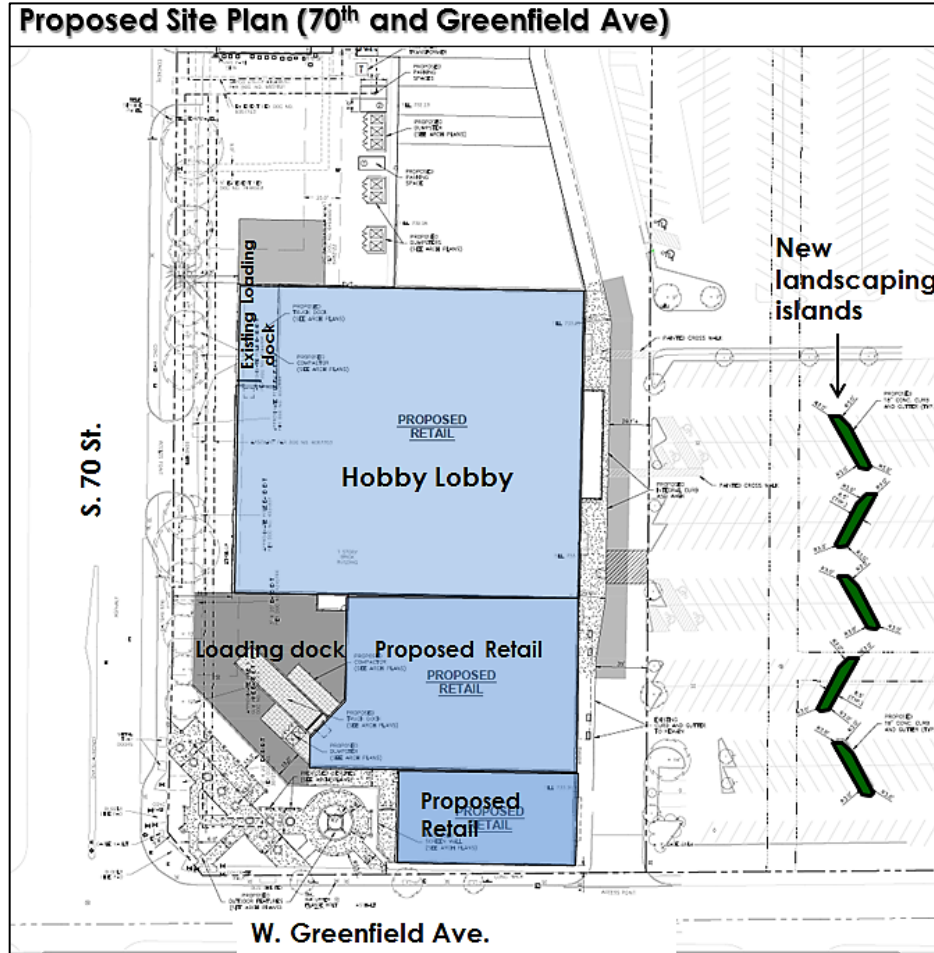
Neighboring uses within this area include: Downtown West Allis, Milwaukee Area Technical College west campus, West Allis West Milwaukee Scholl District administration offices, Summit Place Office complex, West Allis Center (East Office building), Toshiba, Pick n Save, Landmark Apartments, Aurora medical clinic (under construction) and Six Points Redevelopment area.

### Proposed Infill tenants

Ramco is proposing to modify the existing site, landscaping and architecture of the existing building. They are proposing tenant infill within the former Kmart space. Existing tenants north of the former Kmart space (Citi Trends, Game Stop, Rent a Center) would remain. A summary of the scope of infill within the former Kmart building as follows:

1. Tenant 1 (Hobby Lobby) - would be the first, of 3 new tenants. Hobby Lobby is shown as occupying 49,970 sq. ft. of the 86,479 sq. ft. former Kmart space. The existing loading dock area on the north side of the building is proposed to be modified by recessing it within the existing building envelope.

2. Tenant 2 Proposed – is proposed to occupy 20,020-sf. A loading dock and trash compactor and refuse area are proposed on the south west side near the corner of the building and facing street frontages.
3. Tenant 3 Proposed – would occupy 8,016-sf. This retail space would be built on the south end of the property in the current location of the garden center.



Zoning

The Towne Centre is zoned C-3, Community Commercial, which permits retail uses. Therefore this isn't a use approval, but rather a site, landscaping and architectural plan review of the proposed site changes, new construction, and modifications to the property.

The applicant's proposal seeks Plan Commission approval to obtain necessary building permits to commence exterior site changes and exterior building modifications toward re-tenanting the building. The modifications will result in exacerbating an already obsolete building orientation/layout.

In accordance with sec. 12.13 of the Revised Municipal Code the proposed changes require The Plan Commission shall have the power to approve, approve with conditions, or reject a site or architectural plan on the basis of the requirements specified in section 12.13 and in accordance with the Site, Landscaping and Architectural review guidelines.

Appeals. Any person aggrieved by a decision of the Plan Commission under this section may appeal that decision to the Common Council.

**Site, Landscaping and Architectural Design Requirements and Guidelines**

The existing vacancy and proposed demand from new tenants is an opportunity for the developer to reposition the subject property. However, the applicant’s design approach of re-tenant modifications within essentially the same building orientation, will conflict with the City’s Design Standards and Guidelines.

Staff would like to work with the applicant to create a more robust development that repositions the site to embrace the street frontages and the intersection, rather than a continuation of the current context which includes backsides of retail facing our City’s Downtown and intersection of 70 St. and W. Greenfield Ave.

To this end, staff is recommending denial of the site, landscaping and architectural proposal plan, as submitted, as the plans do not satisfy the City’s Site and Architectural Design Standards and Guidelines that are present within 12.13 of the Revised Municipal Code.

The City promotes 4-sided architectural design. The lack of windows, blank walls, loading docks and trash receptacles should not be situated along street frontages. The proposal will not advance the full development potential for this property.

The opportunity is present. Staff would like to work with the applicant to create a more robust development, rather than a continuation of the current context which turns its back on our City’s Downtown and intersection of 70 St and W. Greenfield Ave.

**The Ramco-Gershenson Proposal**

The applicant’s site, landscaping and architectural proposal is discussed below.

After this section staff’s rationale supporting its recommendation for denial will follow.

Partial building demolition - As part of the referenced tenant infill, the applicant proposes to remove/demolish 12,100-sf of building area closest to the corner of S. 70 St and W. Greenfield Ave.

The demolition will make way for the proposed truck dock/loading dock area and refuse/trash compactor area facing the street frontages and the intersection.

**Existing West Allis Towne Centre and proposed demo**



**Architecture**

East façade (faces parking lot) – Total frontage to be modified along the east side of the building is 362-ft. Like the former Kmart tenant, this elevation is proposed to be the storefront side for three proposed new retailers.

The east façade features existing brick facia, with 8 new brick pilaster columns added around 3 new storefront entrances for Hobby Lobby and two other future tenants. New retailer

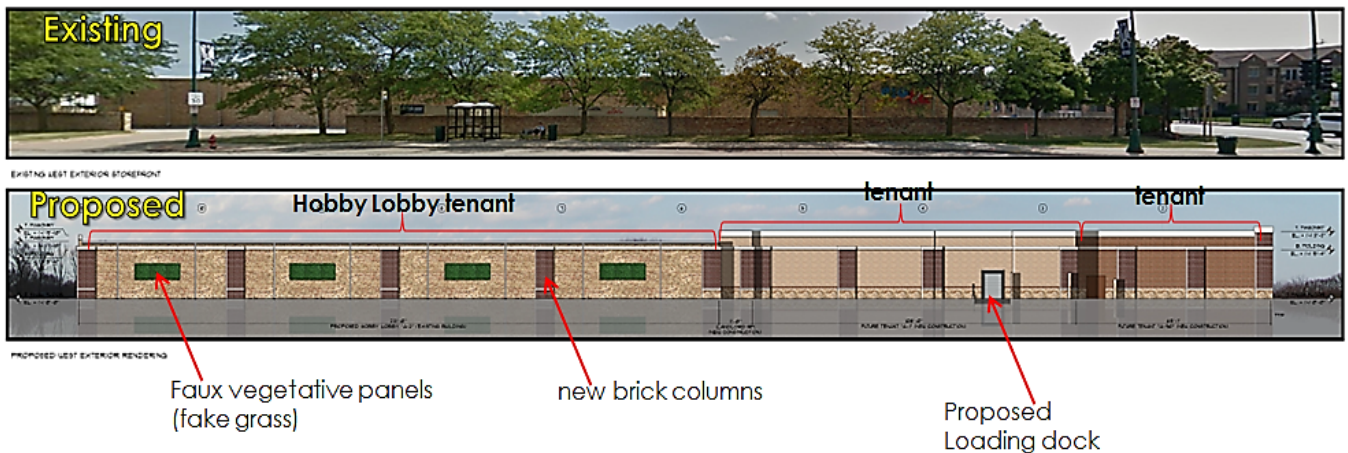
entrance portals to each tenant space are also proposed to project from the east elevation and will feature glazing, awnings and an elevated appearance from the rest of the east elevation. Horizontal EIFS banding and EIFS signage backdrops are proposed over the main entrances.



West façade (faces S. 70 St.) – the backside of the building is proposed to face the street frontages of S. 70 St. and the intersection with W. Greenfield Ave. Our City design guidelines recommend against locating the backside of a building toward a primary street.

The plans submitted propose to modify the west elevation of the building with new masonry columns, horizontal EIFS banding, and “faux vegetative panels.” While staff is advocating for repositioning the building tenant spaces to front street frontages, we also wish to note that faux/artificial vegetative panels aren’t a appropriate type of architectural material and out of character with a building that is situated at a major intersection.

The new loading dock area is proposed along with a refuse area and trash compactor area. The applicant proposes to attempt to screen these features behind a 6-ft wall and landscaping.



South Façade (faces W. Greenfield Ave.) – Given the demolition of part of the building, the south elevation of the building will be stepped, and is comprised of 240-ft of south facing facade. Of this total only 34-ft, of the south elevation would feature windows (the south-most tenant wall, closest to and facing W. Greenfield Ave.)



new brick columns

new Storefront

The existing 6-ft brick wall of the Kmart garden center would be removed and replaced with a new 8,016-sf building measuring approximately 65-ft wide x 123-ft long. This tenants storefront would face east toward the parking lot. The side of this tenants building would run along W. Greenfield Ave. and include a small cluster of windows on the southeast end.

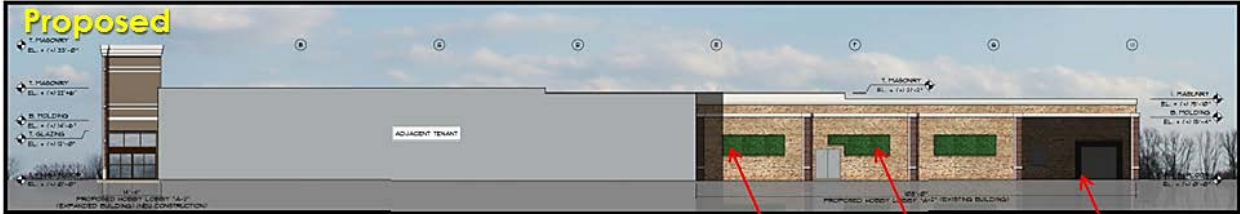
The remainder of the south elevation consists of the new and existing brick building façade with 8 new brick pilaster columns, horizontal EIFS banding along the upper portion of the façade elevation. Cultured stone base along the stepped portion of the existing building.

North façade – The north façade faces the West Allis Office Center (East Office building) and a service area for the back of various retail tenants on site. The north façade of the former Kmart building features an existing loading dock door area. The applicant proposes to recess the loading dock within the building envelope to accommodate trailered unloading into the Hobby Lobby store.

The north elevation is brick and 4 brick pilasters are proposed to be added. Horizontal EIFS banding is also proposed along the upper portion of the roofline. Three faux vegetative panels are proposed on the north elevation.



EXISTING NORTH EXTERIOR STOREFRONT



PROPOSED NORTH EXTERIOR RENDERING

new brick columns      Faux vegetative panels      Hobby Lobby Loading Dock

### Site and Landscaping Plans

The following changes to the existing site plan are proposed:

- a) Demo. Demolition of a 12,100-sf portion of the south west corner of the building. The demolition would establish the space needed for trucks to access a proposed loading dock, refuse area and trash compactor on the southwest side of the property behind new tenant spaces. The backsides of new tenant spaces would continue to face street frontages.

The demolition would also create space for a corner landscape area described below.



- b) Plaza. On the southwest side of the property, several existing trees would be removed and replaced with a new landscaping "plaza area" that would include new landscaping, seating areas, a walkway, raised planters, columns and wood lattice elements and a tower feature (reminiscent of an industrial/Allis Chalmers era). Under the current re-tenant proposal, the shopping center would not feature a pedestrian connection into the shopping center's tenant spaces directly from the corner of S. 70 St. and W. Greenfield Ave. Instead, the proposed retail uses would face (east-toward the parking lot) away from the intersection and street frontages.

Staff note: While the corner landscaping plaza would be an aesthetic feature, its limited in function as to simply screen the loading dock and trash area on the west side of the building (It's a plaza to nowhere). Instead the plaza should function as an entrance portal allowing pedestrian movement into the shopping center.



- c) The new 6-ft brick wall would separate the proposed corner plaza area from the rest of the shopping center thereby maintaining the existing disconnect from the shopping center. An existing portion along S. 70<sup>th</sup> St. 6-ft wall will remain with a new part wrapping around the corner and extending east to the south most tenant space.
- d) The existing 6-ft brick wall of the Kmart garden center would be removed and replaced with foundation plantings along the south side of the property.
- e) Landscaping islands are proposed within the existing parking lot area on the east side of the building.
- f) Four new foundation planters are also proposed on the east storefront wall of the building (two on each side of the Hobby Lobby tenant space and two on each side of the middle tenant space) along the storefront walkway.
- g) The existing walkway along the east side of the building will be re-worked to accommodate new projecting storefront entrances.

### **City Site and Building Design Standards and Site, Landscaping and Architectural Design Guidelines:**

The following section shares staff's perspective of what's wrong with the proposal before us and why we are recommending denial. The City doesn't need to accept a proposal that doesn't satisfy the standards of the zoning ordinance.

It is the intent of the City that new buildings, additions or exterior changes to existing buildings constructed within the City will reflect the surrounding character of the community. To meet that goal, the City has created the following set of design standards and guidelines to assist property owners as they develop plans for new construction or substantial renovation or expansion of existing buildings. The following design standards and guidelines shall apply to any building or structure included under Chapter 12.13 of the City Code, and apply to this review as listed below:



**12.13(9) Zoning Ordinance - Site and Building Design Standards:**

**(9)** Site and Building Design Standards. Site and building designs shall:

**(a)** Site designs shall provide for the placement of all site elements necessary to create a safe, functional, convenient, healthful, durable and attractive environment.

- i. The subject property as originally built has faced the back elevations of its retail stores toward the major intersection of S. 70 St. and W. Greenfield Ave. which isn't an attractive feature as built.
- ii. The applicant's submittal will be visible to the public and will block pedestrian access at the corner. The design isn't welcoming to people as connectivity between the downtown area and the shopping center is absent.
- iii. Buildings should be orientated toward streets. Commercial development designed in modern times is commonly not designed to have the back side of stores or service and utility areas (loading and trash) facing major streets, an intersection a City's downtown. The City's Zoning Ordinance has adopted site and building design standards and guidelines to protect against such bad design.

**(b)** Site designs shall preserve the positive features of the site to the extent possible and minimize their destruction or harmful alteration.

- i. The proposed modifications to the exterior of the building and the site design of this property harms the aesthetic environment by advancing an already obsolete building layout. The City doesn't want to further bad design especially in an area facing major streets, an intersection and the City's downtown.
- ii. All service and utility areas should be located away from the view of the general public. To the extent possible, these areas should be in the rear of the building; however, they should never be located adjacent to residential uses or on the primary street elevation.

**(c)** Site designs shall ensure that all developments function within the context of the site and the surrounding area. Site designs shall eliminate, or if not possible to eliminate, mitigate potential hazards created by the proposed development.

- i. The subject property is located in an area characterized by high volumes of pedestrian traffic, vitality and also offers public transportation. Close proximity to Downtown West Allis, Milwaukee Area Technical College campus, West Allis West Milwaukee School District administration offices, Summit Place Office complex, West Allis Center (East Office building), Toshiba, Grocery stores, area restaurants, apartments, medical clinics and Six Points Redevelopment area. The proposed exterior modifications to the building will exacerbate the existing problem and will not mitigate it. To this end the site design isn't functional; the design is unfriendly and spatially incoherent given the surrounding urban area.

**(d)** Building and structure designs shall avoid alternatives which shall be so similar to, or at variance from, other buildings and structures already constructed or under construction in the area.

- i. Other commercial properties within the area do not face the backside of their building to the street frontage or situate loading and trash areas along street frontages. Therefore the proposal is at odds with the surrounding built environment.
- ii. The City does not want to change its current policy and start the precedent shaping its identity by allowing the back side of stores or service and utility areas (loading and trash) facing major streets, an intersection a City's downtown.

- iv. *Faux vegetative panels and blank, windowless walls without a storefront presence (transparency of windows, doors, awnings, decorative lighting) is not an attractive design option to mitigate the existing or proposed building design.*
- v. *Blank walls should especially be avoided along sidewalks. Window placement can enhance community safety. Pedestrians should feel comforted by window placement with a sense that street crimes could be observed and police summoned to provide assistance.*

*(f) All sites, buildings and structures shall be designed in accordance with site and architectural design criteria adopted and approved in accordance with Subsection (4)(c)-*

- *See below*

**12.13(4)(c) and 12.13(9)(f) City Site, Landscaping and Architectural Design Guidelines (9)(f): General:**

*B. Buildings in areas with pedestrian traffic should be scaled and detailed for the pedestrian, not the automobile driver or rider.*

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*E. Buildings should be oriented toward the principal street abutting the parcel.*

*F. Designs should take into account the building and the site as a whole composition, not as competing factors. The site, the setting, and the amenities surrounding the building on the site should be considered important components of the building's design.*

**Entrances and Windows:**

*The placement of windows and doors on a building are an important part of its overall design. Well-designed windows and doors and their placement can define the overall composition of a design.*

*A. Window and door placement should be used to avoid large blank walls on elevations visible to the public. Blank walls should especially be avoided along sidewalks.*

*B. Window placement can enhance community safety. Pedestrians should feel comforted by window placement with a sense that street crimes could be observed and police summoned to provide assistance.*

**Materials**

*A. Materials should be selected for suitability to the type of building and style in which they are designed and are used or intended to be used. Materials should also be in harmony with surrounding buildings.*

*B. Buildings and additions should continue the same building materials on all sides visible or partly visible from the public right of way.*

*C. The use of natural materials is encouraged including stone, brick and wood. This does not preclude the use of precast materials including decorative concrete block as long as their use corresponds with these guidelines.*

**Service and Utility Areas**

*Every building has some functions which are necessary to the operation of the building but do not need to be visible to or accessible by the public. The site design requirements and*

guidelines of service and utility areas (including loading docks, trash compactors and refuse areas) which apply to this review are listed below:

- a) *All service and utility areas should be located away from the view of the general public. To the extent possible, these areas should be in the rear of the building; however, they should never be located adjacent to residential uses or on the primary street elevation.*

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- c) To the extent possible, the building design should screen service and utility areas from public view. If space permits, utility and service functions should be enclosed with the building envelope.
- d) Where possible, incorporate trash and waste disposal facilities within the building envelope.
- e) Where trash and/or waste disposal facilities must be outside the building envelope, they must be screened from public view. When not located adjacent to the building, they must be screened by a walled enclosure with at least three sides and preferably four. This enclosure should be located in a manner least visible to the passing public and the materials used should closely match the building decor.

**Recommendation:** Recommend denial of the Site, Landscaping and Architectural Plans for proposed site and building changes to a portion of the West Allis Town Center located at 6822-6900 W. Greenfield Ave. submitted by Ross Gallentine of Ramco Gershenson, property owner (Tax Key No. 439-0001-007) based on the following zoning site and building design standards from 12.13(4)(c) and 12.13(9) of the Revised Municipal Code are not satisfied:

- (a) Site designs shall provide for the placement of all site elements necessary to create a safe, functional, convenient, healthful, durable and attractive environment.
- (b) Site designs shall ensure that all developments function within the context of the site and the surrounding area. Site designs shall eliminate, or if not possible to eliminate, mitigate potential hazards created by the proposed development.
- (c) Building and structure designs shall avoid alternatives which are at variance from, other buildings and structures already constructed or under construction in the area.
- (d) All sites, buildings and structures shall be designed in accordance with site and architectural design criteria adopted and approved in accordance with Subsection 12.13(4)(c).