

# Normal Council Approves Love's Truck Stop, RV Park On 30-Acre Site

WGLT | By [Michele Steinbacher](#)

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Bill Gleason, senior real estate project manager with Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores, answers questions during the Normal Town Council meeting Monday, Sept. 20, 2021, in council chambers at Uptown Station.

A 30-acre truck stop and travel center should open next year near the junction of interstates 55, 39, and 74, after Monday's unanimous vote from the Normal Town Council.

The Love's Travel Stop & Country Store will be just off Main Street, north of I-55. The area will include nearly 100 spaces for truck parking, plus a recreational vehicle park able to handle about 60 RVs. Other planned features include a Bojangles chain restaurant, convenience store and a Speedco tire and repair shop.

"Our business model is to come into a community, and be partners, and make it a win-win for everybody, including the neighbors and the town," said Bill Gleason, senior real estate project manager with the Oklahoma City-based company. He said after the meeting that Love's plans construction in the spring, with a projected six- to eight-month

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Normal has owned the 30 acres of farmland for nearly 50 years. On Monday, besides rezoning the farmland as B-1, general business, the council approved a site plan, a preliminary subdivision plan, and conditionally approved a final plat for the project.

Town leaders say Love's development will bring jobs, services and add to the town's tax base. On Monday, several council members shared their support over the economic impact of the expected high-revenue business.

"Thanks for investing in Normal," council member Scott Preston told Love representative Gleason.



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successfully argued the greater height was needed to allow truckers and RV drivers ample notice to cross lanes, and exit the interstate.

"It's very specific to this kind of business," said Mercy Davison, Normal town planner, noting Love's would be working to attract trucks and RVs from three interstates coming from multiple directions.

During the meeting's public comments, John Larkin, whose family's nearly century-old farm stands just north of the planned truck stop, raised some concerns about security, lights and sound pollution.

Larkin said his family understands the march of progress, and that part of Normal is due for development. Still, he said he hopes Love's will be a good neighbor to his 94-year-old father Paul Larkin, who's lived on the farm his entire life.

Larkin opposed the 200-foot sign, and said a 4-foot-high chain link fence, as proposed, wouldn't be sufficient. The family wants a more substantial fence to provide screening from truck stop lights and sounds, and to provide some security.

"The adage is 'good fences make good neighbors.' When your neighbor is a truck stop, or travel center, that's bringing people in from all corners of the United States, it's especially nice to have a good neighbor with a good fence," said John Larkin.

While council members decided the 200-foot sign was needed, several remained

approached the podium, he told the council his company would work with the Larkins regarding the fence.

Later, after the meeting, he met with the Larkins. "We believe in doing the right thing, which is working with the neighbors if they have a concern – talk to them, be able to work out any issues that we have," said Gleason, who after the meeting, talked with the family.

## Retired town employee benefits

Also on Monday, the council OK'd switching town retirees' supplemental health benefits from the Medicare supplement plan to the Medicare Advantage plan.

Council materials note the fiscal 2021-22 budget projects a 4% increase in retiree health benefits' rates for 2022. But with Monday's vote, staff now projects a 33% decrease to that rate.

The switch should save about \$24,000 in the 2021-22 fiscal year, and nearly \$90,000 in the first nine months of FY 2022-23, according to council materials.

In normal cases, the town has a 50-50 cost-sharing plan for retirees, and an 80-20 plan with retirees' spouses, with the town paying the 20% for spouses.

## Evergreen Villas

What arrived to the council as a request for a minor re-subdivision— from 13 lots to 12 lots – in the Evergreen Village Planned Unit Development, evolved into an hour-long discussion about neighborhood residents' multiple concerns about the PUD, also known as Evergreen Villas.

The council voted 6-1 to conditionally approve the change, taking a triplex lot into a duplex lot. Council member Kathleen Lorenz was the only "no" vote.

Dozens of Evergreen residents attended the meeting, with five, including former Normal Mayor Paul Harmon, addressing the council during public comments. They said they found working with the developer problematic. Some of the commenters raised issues about promises not being kept, such as the construction of a community building, or

In other business, the council:

- OK'd spending \$81,00 to outfit two of its water department trucks with snow plows and salt spreaders. Peoria-based Koenig Body Equipment Inc. has previously installed such equipment on 10 of Normal's public works trucks, so the town OK'd contracting with Koenig for consistency on the equipment, and waived the formal bidding process.
- Heard from City Manager Pam Reece that a moratorium on utility shutoffs likely will end in October. So, this week, town staff will begin contacting people with outstanding water bills. They'll create payment plans, and help them sign up for assistance if eligible, she said.



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Michele Steinbacher is a WGLT correspondent. She joined the staff in 2020.

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