



January 25, 2010

## Round 2 of proposed Manchester Walmart vs. pine snakes

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TOMS RIVER BUREAU*

A first round in the rematch between land-use regulators and developers of the proposed Route 37 West Walmart Supercenter starts at 7 p.m. Tuesday, when the township Planning Board holds a special meeting on a revised site plan that would split the property between shoppers and pine snakes.

The project on the Toms River-Manchester border at Northampton Boulevard has been downsized since developers Jay and Linda Grunin and Wal-Mart first brought their plans forward. That initial application was blocked by the state Department of Environmental Protection because a northern pine snake — a reptile on the DEP's list of threatened species — was found denned on the property in the winter of 2005-2006.

The nonvenomous pine snakes favor sandy, pine-oak woods like the forest south of Route 37, and advocates for the project like Manchester Mayor Michael Fressola have argued the DEP should simply allow relocation of the snakes.

The plan was approved in 2005 by the Toms River and Manchester planning boards, but it ran into the snake roadblock during the state's Coastal Area Facility Review Act procedure, which focuses on environmental issues. According to plans filed with Manchester and the state agency, their new efforts to overcome objections raised by the DEP review include:

- 22 acres set aside for the pine snakes, including a 3-acre circle around the 2005 den site.
- A 3,300-foot-long, 4-foot-high wall to keep snakes on their wooded side of the property and off the access drives and parking areas.
- Reducing the building footprint by 10 percent, to just below 188,000 square feet.
- Reducing impervious surface on the site by 7.24 acres — about 33 percent less pavement and building cover. That leaves more open ground to absorb storm water, an important goal for the DEP's land use rules.
- Enhancing pine snake habitat more than five miles across town, where the developers would buy 89 acres of old farmland with Pinelands zoning on Horicon Road, and create more potential nesting sites on the tract.

### Additional Facts

IF YOU GO

WHAT:

Planning board hearing on the proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter on Route 37.

WHEN:

7 p.m. Tuesday.

WHERE:  
Manchester's municipal building, 1 Colonial Dr.

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