

## Cut-through in Royal Poinciana Way median to remain — for now

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Concerned it might impede traffic flow, the Town Council backed away Tuesday from a plan to shut down the cut-through in the Royal Poinciana Way median.

With the new Publix Super Market on nearby Bradley Place opening Thursday, and the state poised to begin work on a new Flagler Memorial Bridge later this winter, council members said they don't want to inadvertently create or worsen traffic snarls on the street.

"We don't know what Publix will do" to traffic, Councilman Robert Wildrick said. He added that a proposed zoning overlay, intended to encourage redevelopment on the street, could create another unknown impact.

"It's a good idea to let all these things clear out before we try this," Councilman Richard Kleid agreed.

The council voted 5-0 to indefinitely table the idea, leaving room for its future resurrection.

The council decided last spring to close the cut-through this season, on a trial basis, to create about 30 more parking spaces to benefit local businesses. The closure might have become permanent if traffic wasn't adversely affected and if residents liked the change, officials said.

The idea was suggested by local attorney and town resident Les Evans, who owns a building on Royal Poinciana Way. Evans has said businesses are hurt by a shortage of parking on the street.

The cut-through has long been in place, enabling eastbound and westbound drivers to swing to the other side of the street without having to reach the intersection at Bradley Place and Coconut Row, or the intersection with County Road. Often referred to as the town's northern gateway, Royal Poinciana Way accommodates traffic to and from the Flagler Bridge, and is in one of the more heavily traveled areas during the season.

In recent weeks, opposition to the closure has emerged from the Palm Beach Civic Association, Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, and some business owners on the street.

"The traffic is obviously going to be a problem" when bridge construction picks up later this season, said Jim Ballentine, chairman of the Civic Association's transportation committee.

Evans, who leases space to businesses at 249 and 253 Royal Poinciana Way, attempted in vain to persuade the council to change its mind.

The new Publix building was partially erected on two parcels that were privately owned parking lots accessed from nearby Sunset and Sunrise avenues, Evans noted. Some of those spaces were leased by store owners for their employees or customers, he said.

"Publix has eliminated 135 [parking] spots," he said. "There's no place for employers to pay for employee parking. It's forced them to move onto the street."

Evans also said the closure would create green space and make the street safer by allowing designation of a crosswalk.

"I see accidents and people driving around looking for parking spaces," he said.

The closure would have cost the town around \$20,000 for barricades, signage and striping, Public Works Director Paul Brazil has said. It also would have required a permit from the Florida Department of Transportation because Royal Poinciana Way is part of State Road A1A. According to Wildrick, the cut-through is landmarked, meaning its closure also would have required review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.