

## Residents weigh in on Winn-Dixie, yogurt shop, & other retailers slated for Mid-City WVUE-TV - Online

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Several retailers and restaurants are being pitched to join Winn-Dixie in a new shopping plaza in Mid-City

\$25 million dollars worth of new construction could soon bring a major grocery store, retailers, and restaurants to a blighted stretch of one New Orleans neighborhood.

At a public meeting Monday evening at the Grace Episcopal Church on Canal Street residents heard straight from the developer of a major project slated for Mid-City that could bring \$25 million dollars worth of new construction in the form of retailers, restaurants, and a major grocery store.

At a crowded meeting of the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO), roughly 100 residents anxiously awaited news of what will come of their not so-liked neighbors—neighbors that haven't been back to their corner of Mid-City since the storm, leaving behind boarded doors and empty parking lots in what used to be a shopping plaza and car dealership along Carrollton Avenue.

"Oh, it's pitiful," said Jane Briggs, Mid-City resident. "It's horrible. Since Katrina, even before that, it looked like a third rate, third world shopping center."

But that stretch of blight is slated for rebirth with the old Bohn Ford car dealership now set to be transformed into a Winn-Dixie Supermarket, with other retailers and restaurants possibly to join.

"We believe it's going to be one of, if not the largest retail redevelopment since Katrina for the entire city," said Jennifer Farwell, President of the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization.

The Winn-Dixie would be the anchor of what's already been dubbed the **Mid-City Market**. Other proposed businesses for the project include Five Guys Hamburger and Fries, Verizon, Felipe's restaurant, Pinkberry yogurt shop, Petco, and Office Depot.

While Winn-Dixie is the only business to sign a leasing agreement, according to the developer, the rest of the proposed shops are in serious talks about signing on as well.

The entire project footprint stretches roughly 100,000 square feet, and with construction on track to begin in either September or October, the entire project is scheduled to be complete in August 2012.

While residents expressed support at the MCNO meeting for the developer of the project, **Stirling Properties**, they did voice concerns.

"While palm trees are attractive visually, they don't really provide much shade," said one resident in the audience in reference to the large number of palm trees included in the design of the shopping plaza.

"What kind of efforts are you all making to have a lot of locally owned businesses fill in retail spots," asked another

resident.

"You got to do something about drainage before it gets to us," said another resident.

Others at the meeting also called the designs 'too suburban,' and the MCNO is now requesting the developer tweak the look to something more reflective of the historic Mid-City neighborhood.

"An entire look that's not too cookie cutter," said Jennifer Farwell, president of the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization. "We're asking things like deep overhangs to allow for shade for people when they're walking.

Farwell says over the next ten days, the MCNO will make its official recommendation to the developer concerning the current design.

"We're looking at maybe making recommendations for materials that harmonize with the original light-industrial usage of the sight," Farwell said. "Maybe some metal and concrete and things like that as opposed to just the brick with those little faux-awnings that you see everywhere."

Farwell says she would also like to see better access for pedestrians since the project will line up against the proposed Lafitte Greenway Park—a 3 mile stretch of trails and bike paths along St. Louis Street, which for now is just a gravel road.

"The city is going to be spending \$6.5 million in Community Development Block Grant funds to build the first phase of the Greenway which runs from City Park Avenue all the way down to the French Quarter," Farwell said. "The Community Development Block Grant funds that have been allocated for this expire at the beginning of 2015, so the project has to be complete by then, but we are hoping that it can be done maybe a year or two earlier than that."

The Vice-President of Stirling Properties tells FOX 8 he is committed to working with neighborhood groups and the city to develop a design that works for both residents and retailer.

"Certainly we're looking to work with them and listen to them and try to find something everyone can agree to," said Townsend Underhill, Vice president of Stirling Properties.

The plan, however, remains far from a done deal. The New Orleans Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council must still review the proposal and weigh in before construction can move forward.

"I think it's wonderful, I think it's convenient," said Briggs. "I believe that it's going to spur the economy in this area," Briggs said.