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# Big box goes back to drawing board

## Northeast 82nd - Mall developer SmartCentres says it will listen to local concerns before forming new plans

Wednesday, October 03, 2007

**ERIN HOOVER BARNETT**  
 The Oregonian Staff

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The developer proposing a controversial big-box retail project on Northeast 82nd Avenue and Siskiyou Street withdrew the application Tuesday and hopes to come back with something more acceptable to the city and the neighborhood.

"Our intention is to resubmit in the near future after having considered all of the environmental -- figuratively speaking -- concerns," said Flavio Volpe, spokesman for SmartCentres, a shopping mall developer based in Toronto.

Neighbors on both sides of 82nd, who mobilized like never before to fend off what they feared would be a Wal-Mart, were elated by the news.

The failed bid, however, illustrates the challenges of developing the property, which sits on a busy thoroughfare, abuts homes and once was a massive landfill.

Residents organized after learning that SmartCentres was seeking a conditional-use permit from the city to build on the 25-acre parcel, zoned for light industrial, at the foot of Rocky Butte and across from Madison High School. Many of SmartCentres' projects in Canada include a Wal-Mart. But Volpe said the developer does not choose tenants until a project is approved.

Residents took no chances. The Roseway and Madison South neighborhoods are changing as white-collar workers and young families fix up bungalows and ranches. New and longtime residents view the way the property is developed as critical to improving the neighborhood and want a community-friendly project that includes locally owned businesses.

They launched petitions and a nonprofit called Save Madison South, put up lawn signs, printed brochures and media kits, and held rallies and fundraisers.

"It seems the developer is about markets, not people," said Bret Blount, a new neighbor and marketing professional. "This is an opportunity to create an urban center that truly leverages the area."

Neighbors don't buy landowner Mike Hashem's belief that a development at the site has to include a big-box store, saying the area is affluent enough to support other types of retail.

Hashem, of Oregon City, bought the land 11 years ago when it housed a driving range. The range went under, and another developer tried to court a Lowe's or similar large retailer but walked away when the market declined after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Hashem said. Now the land lies overgrown and vacant.

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"You need a big box. The question is: How can you do a big box?" Hashem said. "The neighbors, they have a wish list, which is nice if I'm Santa Claus. They want to have Bridgeport Village. I say, 'Hey, I'd love to be associated with something like that.' That's wishful thinking."

Ultimately, the scope of the developer's proposal appears to have been its undoing. SmartCentres proposed 240,000 square feet of retail space -- 190,000 for the big-box store and the rest for smaller shops. A parking lot and smaller stores would front 82nd, and the big store would abut homes.

Neighbors, the city, Metro and the state worried about traffic backing up on 82nd, already a bottleneck at rush hour and a high-crash corridor.

SmartCentres' Volpe, however, didn't want to single out any one issue. "I would say that we are responding to the entire situation," he said.

Hashem hopes SmartCentres, the city and the neighborhood can figure something out. SmartCentres retains an option to develop the property through February.

If no deal develops, Hashem says he'll probably have to sell the 82nd Avenue portion to a retail developer and use the rest for light industrial. But he worries about losing control of the type of retail that comes in. He said he has received dozens of calls from adult-oriented businesses interested in the land.

"I want to associate with something I'm proud of," he said.

On this, he and the neighbors agree.

"Our efforts with the owner are renewed," said neighbor Dawn Tryon, an educator. "If we can all get together and agree on something, then everyone benefits. We aren't opposed to him making money, but it has to be the right fit in the neighborhood."

Su-jin Yim contributed to this report Erin Hoover Barnett: 503-294-5011; [ehbarnett@news.oregonian.com](mailto:ehbarnett@news.oregonian.com)

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