

Central Avenue Special Improvement District

CENTRAL AVENUE NEWS

A True Newsletter Representing the Business Community In the Jersey City Heights

Special Edition Newsletter May 2004

HEIGHTS SAYS "NO" STOP & SHOP SUPERSTORE

Introduction

Where does one begin to explain such a complicated and emotionally charged topic in the Jersey City Heights Community? As it has been the topic of conversation over most dinner tables in recent weeks, many have already familiarized themselves with the issues pertaining to the local Stop & Shop Supermarket's decision to leave their current Central Avenue main street location. The Stop & Shop Supermarket Corporation is willing to stay in the Heights community if, and only if, they receive approval for their proposal of a 110,000 Square Feet (SF) Superstore/ Big Box development in the neighboring residential area of Jefferson, Laidlaw and Summit Avenues. Although the Heights has needed a better supermarket operation for some time, Stop & Shop's proposal contains many alarming factors that have to be considered before the proposal is given a rubber stamp of approval. The Central Avenue SID Management Corporation, representing over 240 main street businesses and over 210 property owners, has engaged in this discussion as it may affect the long term goals of the organization and vital commercial health of all the Heights.

Brief History of the Proposed Site

The site proposed for the Stop & Shop superstore at the intersection of Jefferson, Laidlaw and Summit Avenues in the Jersey City Heights was once home to the Davie Factory (Paper Company). As that industrial factory left the site in 2000, it also left behind an empty brown field which caused an eye sore in the community. Looking past the brown field, it also left behind a highly valued 2.5 acre site zoned R-2 (Multifamily Housing). Without getting into specific detail, the Davie Factory was grandfathered into modern zoning laws. What this means is that it was acceptable to have the preexisting Davie Factory in a designated residential zone until the building's demise, at which time the property would be reverted to its original R-2 zone designation. In 2000, the Jersey City Planning Board, keeping in mind Jersey City's best interest, reaffirmed in the Jersey City Master Plan that the best land use for the Old Davie Site is resi-



dential. In 2001, JDC Development Co., a developer for the Stop & Shop Supermarket Corporation, purchased the land. They disregarded the R-2 zoning and blocked any other development from occurring on the property. There are environmental contamination issues with the site that any developer interested in building has to clean up. The Jersey City School Construction Corporation, which is interested in building a new school, has taken an interest in the site. While continuing to explore other site possibilities in the area, they have not yet committed to any specific location for the school.

Stop & Shop's Proposal

Stop & Shop has distributed a newsletter in the community which describes their proposal as a state of the art two story superstore, with promises of more variety & selection, physical enhancements, and one-stop shopping. The one-stop shopping notion comes from the mall like features of having banking services as well as a pharmacy, one-hour photo, flower shop, office supply store, and more under one roof. The newsletter

"...by a show of hands, how many people want a school (Jefferson & Summit Avenues)? (0 count) How many people would like Stop & Shop there? (6 count) How many people would like to see residential there? (estimated 340 count) Thank You!"

- Father Chris Findlay At Councilman Ward C Steven Lipski's Monthly February 24, 2004



Above Left: Architectural rendering for the proposed the Stop & Shop Superstore. Above Right: Superimposed vision of Superstore incorporating reality factors of Jersey City. This quiet residential area is the wrong location for large commercial development. .

# A Traditional Neighborhood Community



**Above:** Councilman Ward C Steve Lipski's Town Meeting regarding the Proposed Stop & Shop at the Ukrainian Center on Feb 24, 2004. An Estimated 350 people were in attendance to discuss Stop & Shop.

**Below:** Ex-Planning Board trustee and current realtor in Jersey City, Jeff Kaplowitz, discusses with Mayor Cunningham how the proposal for a Big Box Superstore will negatively impact the local community and lower property value. His argument also took into consideration how schools in urban communities followed strict suburban school designs (wide 2 story buildings).



goes on to mention that a new tax base will be established for Jersey City, property value will rise or stabilize, 218 parking spaces, and 275 people will be employed as part-time and full time workers. (*Question: Is there tax on food?*)

## Identifying Concerns in the Proposal

An enormous concern of the proposal is the combined location and size. The 2.5 acre lot at the intersection of Jefferson, Laidlaw and Summit Avenues has enough room to build an estimated 46 new town homes. If this property is allowed to be developed as intended, they would also provide Jersey

City with a new tax base and continue the record high property value for this area. Because of the desirability of this quiet neighborhood and the current zoning laws anticipating the development of 46 new homes, a townhouse recently sold for \$400,000 on a neighboring property on Laidlaw Avenue. According to the Center for the Study of Commercial Activity, Stop & Shop's proposal is classified as being a grocer Superstore/ Big Box because it meets the classification size requirement of 50,000 to 100,000 Square Feet. Stop & Shop's proposed 110,000 SF development contains 80,000 SF of Gross Floor Area for their new store. That is more than three (3) times the traditional supermarket size. Their current location on Central Avenue contains 14,000 SF of Gross Floor Area and thirty (30) parking spaces. Across America, more and more public awareness is being created in regards to the destructive social and economic impact caused by Superstores/ Big Boxes such as Wal-Mart, Target, Toy's R US, and Home Depot. Various governmental departments and organizations have taken on the task of studying and analyzing the general impact of these Big Box retailers. The reported destructive impacts these superstores/ Big Boxes have already had on numerous communities and main streets cannot be ignored. Great examples are taken from areas of Iowa, Maryland, and Toronto. They are described in studies "*Big Box*" Retail Development by the Maryland Department of Planning and *The impact of Big Box Development on Toronto & Retail Structure* by authors K. Jones and M. Doucet.

What does the superstore/ big box proposal from the Stop & Shop Corporation mean for the heart and infrastructure of the Heights Community, the Central Avenue main street? It simply means that another constraint to conducting a successful small business has just been added to Jersey City's already tough business environment. Remember the old cliché: "The business man follows the dollar, the dollar does not follow the business man". What will happen when small businesses in direct competition barely get by because they cannot compete with the huge superstore? Those businesses will simply relocate to another community that will embrace them instead of deter their efforts. What does that do to the pedestrian traffic those businesses generated that other main street businesses depend on? Who will get stuck with a ¾ mile semi-occupied main street? What does that do to the desirability of the community and everyone's property value?

For those that may criticize Central Avenue's credibility, please take the following into consideration: Central Avenue has a 94% storefront occupancy. Central Avenue currently has a lower vacancy rate than that being described by nationwide realtors such as *Colliers International*. The national downtown vacancy rate ranges between 10%-15%. This means that existing businesses on Central Avenue are providing basic levels of services to the general community such as the eight (8) successfully run dollar stores which total only 3% of Central Avenue's 240 businesses. Over the last two years, Central Avenue has seen a positive change beginning

# vs. An Aggressive BIG BOX RETAILER

to take place as business are investing in the area. New, various, and more upscale business ventures are opening up on Central Avenue such as Gothic Cabinets (260 Central Ave), Charles Grill Restaurant (456 Central Ave; *try the chicken— it will leave you wanting more!*), Princess CUC Wedding Center (454 Central Ave), Wear House (311 Central Ave), Pollo Supremo (254 Central Ave), and more continue to come. Even the older establishments on Central Avenue are reinvesting in their businesses. Pizza Master/ Renato's Restaurant (276 Central Ave) has completely remodeled their establishment. Sham's Unisex Hair Studio (429 Central Ave) and C.H. Martin (256 Central Ave) have renovated their façade in the last year and others continue to reinvest. We should hope to continue implementing reasonable business incentives that will attract other varieties of businesses to our main streets, while protecting those already established.

Heights community leaders have discussed these and other **Quality of Life Issues** extensively:

- ▶ A big drop in citywide commerce & small businesses;
- ▶ Additional heavy traffic congestion in a residential area due to the big retailer drawing shoppers from further distances. (*Note: residential roads are small and narrow by design and were never intended for heavy traffic*); Superstore of this size will require an estimated 15 to 20 tractor trailer deliveries, plus 20-25 vendor trucks per day to support its' enlarged target customer base of Journal Square, Union City, and other neighboring municipalities. The *Food Marketing Institute*, an organization of national Food Markets which the Stop & Shop Supermarket Corporation is an affiliate, states that a superstore the size of 70,000 SF averages \$800,000 in gross sales per week with 4,500 customer transactions per day;
- ▶ Additional air, noise, and light pollution in an already over polluted Hudson County (*According to "Hudson County at Risk," a study released in 2003 by the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG), Hudson County is the second-worst region in the country for air toxicity with only Lower Manhattan is being worse*);
- ▶ Time obstruction to the neighboring Fire Station;
- ▶ Safety of the 600+ children in the area from the newly constructed grammar school right behind the fire station;
- ▶ Risk of compromising the restoration efforts at the highly valued and neighboring Reservoir 3;
- ▶ And impact on property value for Heights home owners as the community may begin to deteriorate.

## Conclusion of the CASID

Community leaders and Neighborhood Block Associations have united in the Heights Pride Committee to spearhead the opposition to Stop & Shop's proposal, in the name of protecting the integrity of their beloved community. After reviewing numerous case studies in other urban areas, the CASID has decided to SUPPORT community leaders in their effort to protect the residential zoning status at Jefferson and Summit



**Above:** Heights Pride Committee, using donated resources, has hung three banners across the Central Avenue main street in opposition to the proposed Stop & Shop Superstore/ Big Box.

Avenues by joining this coalition. The purpose of zoning laws are to separate commercial uses from residential.

Since 1992, CASID has administered more than 2.5 million in combined private assessment and State UEZ funds to revitalize Central Avenue. Allowing Stop & Shop's proposal for a superstore/ big box to go uncontested in a residential area, knowing full well the destructive economic impact this kind of development has caused similar communities, is unethical. Additionally, it completely undermines the investments made and compromises the future goals of Central Avenue. While only a small percentage of the estimated 450 CASID members favor Stop & Shop for personal or political reasons, the CASID decision to support the Heights Pride Committee is based on the best interest of the general community and all CASID members. The Heights Pride Committee is funded by donations from the community and NOT from the CASID. On March 10, 2004, the CASID met with Stop & Shop Public Affairs Consultant Steven Reid and JDC Developer Robert Weiner to discuss other possibilities for their continued operation in Jersey City. A compromise solution could not be reached. As a business organization, the CASID does wish Stop & Shop much success in their other ventures.

## Status Review

Since January 2004, Stop & Shop has pulled out all the stops to sell their proposal to the Jersey City Heights. They have heavily distributed their newsletter in the community and are intensely asking their customers at the current Central Avenue location to sign the petition in favor of the proposal as they go through the checkout lines. Stop & Shop's Public Affairs Consultant has met with numerous Neighborhood Block Associations, community organizations, and even political groups to gain support for the superstore. At those meetings, it has been repeatedly mentioned that if Stop & Shop does not get approval at Jefferson and Summit Avenues, then the Heights will not get another supermarket because Stop & Shop will close their doors. This would leave 70 people out of a job. They would

then exhaust the extended 25 year lease (containing options) they have at their current location in the already established Central Avenue business district. Although this may sound like blackmail coming from what was once believed to be a community friendly supermarket, Stop & Shop representatives have assured that it is not blackmail but rather it is “the facts”.

At Councilman Ward C Steven Lipski’s monthly meeting, held Tuesday February 24, 2004 at the Ukrainian Center, the Stop & Shop’s issue was brought before Jersey City Mayor Glenn D. Cunningham. 350 people came out strong, including Ward D Councilman William Gaughan, to discuss the issue. Although this meeting was supposed to have a presentation made by Stop & Shop, no such presentation was given due to some unfortunate miscommunication in scheduling their speaker. However, representatives from the School Construction Corporation were there to express their interest in the site. As the focus of the night became centered around Stop & Shop’s superstore, the key point of the night was when local Heights resident, Father Chris Findlay, stood up and made the following statement: “...by a show of hands, how many people want a school (Jefferson & Summit Avenues)? (0 count) How many people would like Stop & Shop there? (6 count) How many people would like to see residential there? (estimated 340 count) Thank You!”. The community’s statement to our Mayor was strong and simple: A Stop & Shop superstore does not belong at Jefferson, Laidlaw and Summit Avenues. Since then, both Mayor Cunningham and Councilman Lipski have taken the position that they will base their decision to support or oppose Stop & Shop’s proposal from the general feedback of their

*“...If Stop & Shop leaves (Central Avenue) then we will fight like hell to get a new vendor to come in and that is a possibility.”*

- Mayor Glenn D. Cunningham  
at PS #8 Block Association  
meeting April 21, 2004

constituents. Stop & Shop representatives have also doubled their efforts to persuade the community, in many different manners, to write letters to the local newspapers and Mayor’s office in favor of the proposal. The Mayor has shown his commitment to the community, as he stated during his visit with PS #8 Neighborhood Block Association on April 21, 2004:

“...If Stop & Shop leaves (Central Avenue) then we will fight like hell to get a new vendor to come in and that is a possibility.” Even if Stop & Shop pulls out of the Jersey City Heights, you can rest assure and know that the Mayor and his Administration will do all that they can to get another supermarket in the Heights. CASID will provide them with as much

aid and encouragement as possible until the matter is resolved.

### General Conclusion

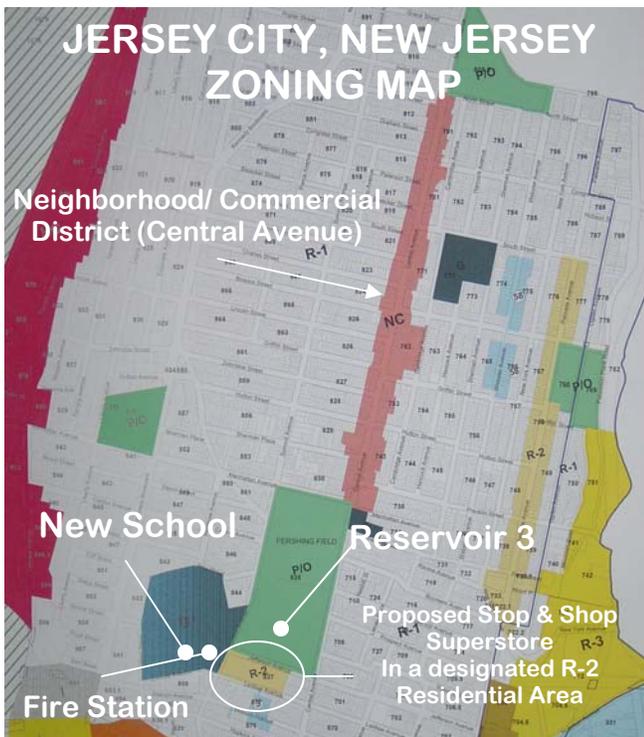
Before a hasty decision is made to support the Stop & Shop superstore/ big box, you need to take all things into consideration. Stop & Shop’s sales pitch includes an aesthetically pleasing building and one stop shopping convenience. It promises 200 new jobs, and the notion that this is what you want. Is this what you want – more car trips, more car dependency, more pollution, more stress associated with a lower quality of life, and more City wide unemployment due to less small businesses and commerce in Jersey City?

The Jersey City Heights has expressed the need for a better operated traditional supermarket within the already established business district. If the deeply rooted Netherlands based Stop & Shop Corporation can’t provide a solution to fit that design, then maybe they don’t fit in our urban community. Their proposal belongs in the suburbs and not in a residential urban area. **Make no mistake about it, Stop & Shop’s proposal is a wolf in sheep’s clothing! Because they have imitated the same formula of conducting business, Stop & Shop’s proposal is the supermarket version of the community destructive, Wal-Mart.** As a community we need to educate ourselves on this issue. Research this matter using keywords: “Supermarket; Superstore; Big Box Retail”.

Bring a friend and attend the Zoning Board hearing for the Stop & Shop superstore proposal and raise your concerns:

- 1st Hearing: Thursday Jul 15, 2004 (date subject to change so please stay informed)
- Time & Location of Zoning Board Meeting:  
6 PM at PS#28 School (167 Hancock Ave.)

Or write letters to local Newspapers, CASID, & the Mayor’s office and express your opinion while spreading public awareness



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