

MIAMI BEACH

Publix planned for 5th Street

South Pointe residents' wishes for a supermarket inch closer to reality as developers and the city negotiate to bring a Publix to Fifth Street.

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Residents in the South Pointe neighborhood of Miami Beach have long clamored for a supermarket.

They may get one by the end of next year, if several hurdles are cleared.

The developers behind a planned multilevel retail center on three acres of land at the intersection of Fifth Street and Alton Road say they are close to signing a lease with supermarket giant Publix.

If built as planned, the supermarket would be 45,000 square feet, comparable in store size to the Publix on West Avenue. It is one of several businesses planned for a new retail center on land many consider the gateway to South Beach.

The South Pointe neighborhood has seen marked development in recent years, including dozens of multimillion-dollar condominium projects and a new Pier One home decor store.

♦ TURN TO PUBLIX, 4

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♦ PUBLIX, FROM 3

"I think there is a tremendous void in terms of available retail, and there's been a lot of support for convenience-type retail for residents who right now are having to drive to Dadeland and Aventura to get those services," said Jeff Berkowitz, who is developing the site with auto moguls Alan and Robert Potamkin.

But the project, located on the northeast corner of the intersection, has some major hurdles to clear.

Among them: approval by the city commission, which must first agree to give up a public alleyway that runs behind the property. It must also be approved by the city's Historic Preservation and Design Review boards.

There are also concerns that Publix and any other

major retail store at that site would mean added traffic woes.

"The intersection of Alton and Fifth is one of the major problem intersections in the city," said South Pointe resident Frank DelVecchio. "A market of this size is a magnet for major traffic. This is a major project that should require major scrutiny."

If all the hurdles are cleared, the supermarket should open in late 2005, said Berkowitz.

A new element of the deal, discussed last month at a meeting of City's Finance and Citywide Committee, would allow the city to purchase and operate 503 of the 900-plus parking spaces in a garage planned for the site.

The price tag: \$7 million or \$14,000 per parking spot, a price way below market value, said Commissioner Jose Smith.

"Parking is a critical component of the project," said Smith, who added that the price per space is a steal when there are developers in the city who have paid as much as \$35,000 a space.

Smith says the commission is mindful of concerns, raised at the Finance Committee meeting, that the city is funding a garage in South Beach and not addressing parking shortages in other areas.

"If the parking component is not the best deal for the city, we can always back out," Smith said.

Despite parking and traffic concerns, the supermarket is something many of the area's seniors look forward to, said Rosalia Lopez.

Lopez, a resident at Rebecca Towers, located four blocks from the site, says many seniors now rely on public transportation to get to the nearest Publix, located at Dade Boulevard, more than a mile away from the Fifth Street site.

"It's a struggle to travel so far to get groceries, not to mention that you have to wait in the heat or in the rain for the bus to take you back home," said Lopez. "A Publix nearby would make a big difference. I just hope we see it