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MIAMI BEACH

## Two city boards back proposed shopping center

A multilevel retail complex, slated to take up an entire city block at the crucial intersection of Fifth Street and Alton Road, has been approved by two Miami Beach boards.

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The Design Review and Historic Preservation boards voted last week to approve the Fifth & Alton Shopping Center development, which would straddle an entire block at one of the main entrances to Miami Beach.

The development, at 501 Alton Rd. where the MacArthur Causeway spills into the city, would bring a supermarket and other retail stores to an area that has long clamored for them. The project passed both boards unanimously in a joint Aug. 17 meeting, and next will go before the Miami Beach City Commission.

"This vote means it's coming, and we're very excited to have the approvals, particularly unanimous approvals," said Jeff Berkowitz, who is developing the site with auto moguls Alan and Robert Potamkin. "There was no community opposition in the meeting, and it's clear that there's a retail void in the city and the residents of Miami Beach want and need the retail."

The commission still must agree to give up a public alleyway behind the project before it can proceed.

The shopping center is slated to have three levels of retail space, including a 44,000-square-foot supermarket, integrated into a seven-story parking garage with more than 900 parking spaces.

The developers are negotiating with dozens of prospective tenants, including supermarket giant Publix.

This last joint meeting was the third time the two boards considered the project, and the final approved plan encompassed criticisms and suggestions from those previous presentations.

"It's going to be an interesting addition to the Beach and this last plan addressed a lot of the concerns we had previously," said Design Review Board member Gary Knight. "The developers worked hard to respond to those concerns."

The boards did add some conditions to the approval, mostly recommendations that city staff members made in their report on the project. Among them were stipulations on the final color scheme and the kinds of trees to be used in landscaping.

"City staff felt that the applicants had made substantial positive modification to the project since it started off," said Thomas Mooney, the city's design and preservation manager. "The original version didn't address the context of the area, but this last [version] . . . bridged the gap and is much more architecturally compatible with the area."

The shopping center could be open by mid-2006, depending on how long it takes to finalize the plan and get the necessary approvals, Berkowitz said.

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