

# Grocery options presented

## City considers supermarket proposals

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After more than two years without a grocery store, plans are being made to bring a supermarket to Ward 5 in West Las Vegas.



Jim Miller/VIEW Mario Berlanga, owner of Mario's Westside Market, is one of several to put forward a proposal for a full-sized supermarket on city-owned land in Las Vegas' Ward 5.

At a town hall meeting on May 8 at the Doolittle Community Center, several possibilities for the area emerged.



Jim Miller/VIEW If Mario Berlanga's plan is selected, he said he would move and expand his Mario's West Side Market, which is at Lake Mead and Martin Luther King boulevards, across the street to the 10-acre, city-owned site where a new shopping center has been proposed.

One plan would see a small Save-A-Lot open in the long-empty Vons building at Edmond Town Center and share that space with a police gang violence center.

Deputy Sheriff Tom Lozich said, "We need to be more centrally located when it comes to attacking gang violence." The current offices are located near McCarran Airport.

The city of Las Vegas is seeking to broker an

Advertisement

An advertisement featuring a red and yellow "Yellow Pages" directory for Las Vegas. The directory is tilted and shows a list of businesses. To the right is the Sprint logo, which consists of a red diamond shape followed by the word "Sprint." in a serif font. Below the directory and logo is a night-time photograph of the Las Vegas city skyline with its lights reflecting on the water. At the bottom of the advertisement is a red banner with the text "Las Vegas Yellow Pages" in white.

agreement to bring a food retailer to that spot but the

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decision to sub-lease the space can only be made by Vons' parent company and lease holder Safeway.

The city council has significantly more say in the future of a shopping center to be built at a 10-acre spot at Lake Mead and Martin Luther King boulevards.

The city owns the land and, in the interests of bringing a supermarket to the area, has offered to give the land to a developer under an agreement that the savings would be passed on to any supermarket tenant as reduced rent. The city also has offered to underwrite the building of the supermarket's exterior up to \$5 million. But the developer must bring their own supermarket.

There are currently eight candidates for the site. Three candidates addressed the crowd at the Doolittle Center.

Leni Skaar, a consultant representing the British chain Tesco in Las Vegas, said the company was interested in being part of the city's development. They have a developer lined up. Also, she said a Starbucks or perhaps a Dunkin' Donuts would come with. The company is one of the largest in the world but the Fresh and Easy chain they are seeking to launch in the United States is new. The 14,000-square-foot Fresh and Easy would have no gaming, alcohol or tobacco.

Hank Gordon, chief executive officer of the Las Vegas-based Laurich Properties, spoke of bringing a 69,000-square-foot Food 4 Less to the same center. Food 4 Less is seriously considering committing to opening at the site, pending an economic assessment. But Gordon projected confidence that a commitment would come. His plan includes bringing a bank and a gas station to the development, as well.

Those two were invited to the meeting in advance but Cary Lefton, representing Agora Realty, was a last minute addition to the agenda. Agora would back Mario Berlanga, owner of Mario's Westside Market, to bring a full-sized market to the plaza. The developer would make spaces for small, independent retail shops and work with Wells Fargo Bank to get loans for their tenants, said Lefton. He said the company had experience creating opportunities for small business owners and specialized in "urban in-fill."

"We have a firm commitment that Mario's will stay in the community," Lefton said, emphasizing the community-

oriented nature of Agora's proposal.

The proposal submitted by Agora was still in a general, draft stage, but the developer plans to resubmit a more complete proposal soon. Lefton said later the space would be about 30,000 square feet.

After the meeting, Berlanga said three months ago he got the brush off from the city for his original proposal without a developer. He added that he has had Agora's support for about a month now.

"They feel the little guy can't do it," Berlanga said.

Berlanga runs a credit board for the elderly, sponsors a baseball team, and nearly all of his employees are from the area, he said.

Like other supporters at the meeting, friend and former Berlanga employee Judy Jackson wore a T-shirt bearing the legend: "I Am a Supporter of Mario's Neighborhood Market." She said it was given to her by another friend and former employee of the shop owner. Jackson, a West Las Vegas resident, said, "He's been in the community awhile and he wants to stay."

A number of members from local chapters of the national social activist group ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) came out in support of Berlanga.

Veronica Dunn-Jones, chair for the West Las Vegas chapter of ACORN, spoke out strongly against the Save-A-Lot and gang violence center, calling it, "half a store and half a Metro."

Edna Jagar, another ACORN leader, said her group would not be satisfied with anything less than 25,000 square feet, affordable and quality food and preferential hiring for West Las Vegas residents with permission for labor to organize.

Some more brief proposals came like the plan from Alejandro Alvarez, owner of Don Alejandro's Texan Grill at McCarran Airport, for a "Via Latina" plaza. The shopping center would be similar to Las Vegas' Chinatown Mall for Latin and Caribbean businesses.

Adams said his office believed the best way to serve the community was with a national chain that would appeal to everyone.

Still, all proposals will be available to the council.

West Las Vegas resident Ada Glover wasn't sure what option she favored but said, "most of the families that live in the area are older people. They need a discount chain."

Interim Ward 5 councilwoman Brenda Williams, who requested the town hall meeting, said the two candidates running for the Ward 5 City Council seat, Stacie Truesdell and Ricki Barlow, will have to make the final decision.

Barlow said later in an interview that, if elected, he would "weed through" all of the proposals to find the best one. He is keeping an open mind, he said, because, "everyone's ideas for this site can be beneficial."

Truesdell looks forward to hearing all the proposals, as well.

"It's wonderful that we have so many people interested in bringing a grocery store to the neighborhood," she said.