

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Kuhn's drops plans for Hill District store

By Jeremy Boren
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Owners of the Kuhn's Market chain said Tuesday they no longer are interested in building a long-awaited grocery store in the Hill District.

"It's a personal reason. It's a health issue," said Dan Sakala, Kuhn's advertising director, who declined to provide more specific reasons.

Negotiations with the family-owned company languished since last November, when the city Urban Redevelopment Authority selected Kuhn's over Sav-A-Lot, a discount St. Louis-based grocer.

URA spokeswoman Megan Stearman said Joe Dentici, one of the owners of the chain of nine stores, has cancer.

"There's been a lull in moving anything forward because of his health issues," she said. "But we don't want to write Kuhn's off completely."

She said the URA is talking with other interested grocers but leaving the door open for Kuhn's.

Kuhn's and Sav-A-Lot vied for access to URA-owned land along Centre Avenue and \$2 million in start-up subsidies offered by the authority and the Pittsburgh Penguins as part of a "community benefits agreement" intended to improve the area around the Consol Energy Center once it's built.

City Councilwoman Tonya Payne said Kuhn's made controversial demands during negotiations with the Hill House Economic Development Corp., which has access to land where the 40,000-square-foot store was to be built.

"(Kuhn's) wanted to have ownership, versus a lease. They wanted a mini-police station within the store, and there were all sorts of stipulations in there that simply weren't doable," Payne said.

People who attended public hearings about proposals for the store said they did not want a discount grocer such as Sav-A-Lot.

"But if we had gone with Sav-A-Lot, we could be actually shopping there today," Payne said.

Evan Frazier, executive director of the nonprofit Hill House Association, said his group is courting other grocers interested in building there. He would not provide names.

"People here have been waiting for a grocery store for nearly 30 years now, so we owe it to the community to make sure all alternatives are pursued," he said.

Carl Redwood Jr, chairman of the One Hill Neighborhood Coalition, said he's confident a grocery will be built eventually.

The coalition is a grassroots group of Hill District residents and business that successfully lobbied city, county and Penguins officials for an agreement that guarantees the \$2 million in funding for a grocery store, first crack at jobs in the new arena and a job resource center.

"We'll have a store. Which store is still not clear," he said. "There are considerable resources for an operator who wants to do business in the Hill."

Howard Slaughter Jr., CEO of Landmarks Community Capital Corp., said Sav-A-Lot officials are still interested in building a store in the Hill District, and perhaps others in the city. Slaughter has served as a liaison between the discount grocer and the city for more than year.

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