

ANGRY BRONX RETAILERS

Superstore not their bag

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A plan to build a superstore in the Bronx has drawn the ire of unions and local grocery stores and sparked a controversy about the Planning Commission review process.

The retail chain, BJ's Wholesale Club, wants to build a 130,000-square-foot store on Brush Avenue in the Throgs Neck section. The project developer is The Related Companies, a firm perceived to have close ties to the Bloomberg administration.

The city Planning Department approved a conditional "negative declaration," which states the project has environmental impacts that can be fixed. The Planning Commission held a hearing on the matter last month, but has yet to vote. If approved, it would go to the City Council.

Critics say, however, that the store would increase traffic and endanger local supermarkets and jobs by siphoning off business. They plan to hold a rally today at City Hall.

"It will have a profound effect on local supermarkets, yet there was no economic impact analysis and no full environmental review," said Richard Lipsky, who represents the local supermarkets.

The "negative declaration," the critics said, relied on studies supplied by Related.

"Basically it was a 20-page review done by the developer," said Patrick Purcell, director of

organizing for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 1500.

Rachaele Raynoff, Planning Commission spokeswoman, said the project does not meet the 200,000-square-foot threshold to require more extensive review.

"We concluded the project would not have significant impacts," said Robert Dobruskin, director of Environmental Assessment and Review with city planning. "It's not necessary to go to the next level of review if that is the conclusion."

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The president of Related, Stephen Ross, has given more than \$750,000 to the city's Olympics effort, NYC2012. And as mayor, Bloomberg has presided over at least five major announcements regarding Ross

projects.

The BJ's controversy came to a head at the Nov. 17 Planning Commission meeting. Lipsky and Purcell said they were told to arrive at 11 a.m., but the hearing was held at 10 a.m. Planning Commissioner Amanda Burden refused to reopen the hearing.

"It's clearly the type of response given to a favored applicant," Purcell said.

But Raynoff supplied a copy of the meeting agenda to Newsday, which indicated the project was the first item. "We don't reopen hearings," Raynoff said. Lipsky "provided paperwork which we supplied to commission members."