

Neighborhood Retail Alliance

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*** Press Release ***

Press Conference on BJ's Warehouse Club

*Business and Labor Coalition Demands the Re-Opening of the Hearing
Process: City Planning Commission Accused of Bias*

When: Tuesday December 7, 2004
Where: City Hall Steps
Time: 12:30 p.m.

A coalition of small business organizations, good government groups and labor will be joined by City Council members Annabel Palma, Charles Barron, Mike Nelson, Dominick Recchia, Joe Addabbo, Alan Gerson, and Christine Quinn on the steps of City Hall on Tuesday, December the 7th, at 12:30 p.m. for a press conference demanding that the City Planning Commission re-open its hearing on a 130,000 sq. ft. BJ's megastore that the Related Companies would like to build in the Bronx. The outsized store is not permitted on the East Bronx site without a special permit. Such a permit must be granted by the Planning Commission and the City Council.

The press conference is prompted by the actions of the City Planning Commission. On November 17th, Amanda Burden, the chair of the commission, decided that she would lock out the opponents of a BJ's big box megastore and prevent them from

testifying against a project that will damage workers' rights and neighborhood businesses all over the Bronx.

On that fate hearing day, armed with information provided by the Commission staff, the opponents arrived promptly at 11:00. Ready to testify were representatives of the United Food and Commercial Workers union locals 1500, 342 and 348 as well as Retail, Wholesale, Department Store union local 338. Collectively these locals represent around 10,000 Bronx workers concerned that the BJ's megastore will put their jobs and family wages in jeopardy.

In addition, leaders of the National Supermarket Association, the Small Business Congress and the Korean American Small Business Service Center were also on hand to testify. These small business advocates represent thousands of Bronx supermarkets, green grocers and bodegas who are worried about the impact BJ's will have on the neighborhood commercial strips.

Burden Shuts Out Testimony

Upon arrival, the opponents were told that the BJ's hearing had been held at 10:00 a.m. and closed at 10:30. When Burden was asked to re-open the hearing for the opponents who had been clearly misinformed, she flatly refused thus creating the spectacle of a Planning Commission Chair who takes a \$1 a year salary shutting out the voice of workers and small businesses concerned with their livelihood.

Failure of the Review Process

The ill-considered decision of Ms. Burden adds weight to the suspicion that the entire BJ's review process lacks fairness and integrity. This is not the first time that

opponents of the project have been denied the opportunity to fully present their case. In an apparent rush to judgment Community Planning Board #10 in the Bronx moved to vote on the BJ's application in so precipitous a manner – these decisions are normally laid over in there is controversy – that opponents were prevented from making a case against the store.

Even worse, the Department of City Planning, the agency charged with doing the initial due diligence, failed miserably in this task by allowing the BJ's application to go forward without an economic impact study. This means that the application for building the largest food store in the Bronx, one that could affect the fortunes of 30 supermarkets as well as the Hunts Point Terminal Market, is moving forward with vital information missing. Decision makers are being asked to rule on the project in the dark.

Questions will be raised in this regard about the favoritism being shown to the Related Companies, evidence of which has been noted in other projects all of the city.

In addition, the results of a traffic study commissioned by the Neighborhood Retail Alliance will underscore how the developer's consultants have seriously underestimated the traffic impacts of the project. In particular, the fact that a key access point, the Unionport Bridge, will be undergoing extensive repairs for up to five years, wasn't even factored into the traffic study done for the developer. As Paul Fernandez, president of the National Supermarket Association, points out, "We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to bring quality supermarkets to neighborhoods all over the city. Now it appears that strings are being pulled to help a large competitor put our investments at risk."

Organized labor will have a large presence at the press conference. Representatives of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1500, 342 and 348 will be joined by the Retail, Wholesale Department Store union, local 338. As Local 1500 president Bruce Both points out, “BJ’s is an anti-union employer that mistreats its work force, and whose presence in the city will lead to a race to the bottom for both wages and benefits.”

Organizations Attending

Jobs with Justice	UFCW Locals 7500, 342, 348, 359
Small Business Congress	RWDSU Local 338
Bodega Association	Korean American Small Business
ACORN	Service Center
Working Families Party	Mainstreet Alliance