

Firm unveils latest plans for Giant

By **ELIZABETH WIENER**

Current Staff Writer

Stop & Shop consultants Monday presented plans for an expanded and modernized Giant supermarket on Newark Street, complete with new retail stores, apartments, town houses, more green space and sidewalk seating on Wisconsin Avenue.

But the long-awaited plan offered a possible new point of contention. To help pay for the ambitious redevelopment of the rundown shopping area, Stop & Shop — now Giant's corporate parent — is proposing to build a five-story complex on the triangular block to the north of the old supermarket, including some 124 new housing units.

The fate of the proposal is far from clear. Roughly six years ago, opposition torpedoed Giant's initial plans for a big store fronting Wisconsin and a large above-ground parking garage in the rear. The company ultimately shelved a more modest plan being worked out with



Courtesy of Streetworks

The plan for the supermarket and the adjoining land includes a five-story housing complex. The firm will be seeking Zoning Commission approval.

community groups and city officials.

Many in the audience at the Monday meeting at Washington Hebrew Congregation were clearly eager to see the project get going after waiting so long for a mod-

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ernizedsupermarket. When Tony Colavolpe, Stop & Shop's senior vice president for real estate, said most neighbors "would like us to start tomorrow," there were cries from the audience correcting him. "Yesterday," several people said.

But because the new plan involves higher density than normally allowed in the low-rise commercial zone, and would place a portion of the supermarket in a residential zone, it requires zoning changes. Now couched as a planned-unit development, the entire proposal will undergo extensive public hearings and vetting by city zoning authorities.

A neighborhood commercial overlay with even stricter limits on heights and density makes the five-story part of the proposal particularly dicey.

Cleveland Park advisory neighborhood commission chair Nancy MacWood, who has been pushing Giant to get on with the supermarket expansion, said the project as a whole faces "many hurdles. To my knowledge, there's never been a planned-unit development in our neighborhood."

Meanwhile, Stop & Shop has been honing its plans with the help of an urban design and development firm called Streetworks, which also helped shape Bethesda Row and shopping areas in Old Town Alexandria and Reston. The two firms are working on a comprehensive redevelopment of the two blocks that Giant owns on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue, from just north of Macomb Street to Idaho Avenue.

Richard Heapes of Streetworks laid out the latest plans, beginning with a much larger supermarket pushed back to the middle of its block, with two levels of underground parking, retail stores facing Wisconsin Avenue, and 10 town houses on the rear of the block facing Idaho Avenue.

Heapes said the plan responds to many neighborhood concerns. "If you put the super-

market out front, you have a blank wall on Wisconsin," he said. Pushing it back makes room for lively, "pedestrian-friendly" stores on the avenue. The town houses, meanwhile, would retain "the residential character" of Idaho Avenue.

The plans include three vehicle entries to the supermarket garage, including a separate access point and enclosed loading dock for trucks, Heapes said. A green "boulevard space" in the middle of Newark Street could be used for an occasional street fair or farmers market, he said. And a second floor over the storefronts and part of the supermarket would accommodate about 10 apartments and office space for commercial tenants displaced from the northern block.

Heapes showed slides transforming the drab block into a colorful streetscape of small stores, awnings, sidewalk tables and chairs. The sidewalk outside the long-vacant Murphy's, currently a ghost town, is "actually as wide as Fifth Avenue" in Manhattan and could be filled with shoppers, cafes and green space, he said.

His proposal for the block to the north raised more concerns.

The triangular parcel, bounded by Wisconsin Avenue, Newark Street and Idaho Avenue, now holds two stories of shops and offices, with a parking lot in the rear. Stop & Shop wants to demolish all of it, building a five-story triangular building with below-grade parking, shops on the first floor, and four residential floors above.

Heapes noted that other residential buildings lining Wisconsin are taller, including the Vaughn Place mixed-use building directly across Idaho Avenue. The Stop & Shop building, slightly less than 65 feet tall, would have an interior courtyard and incorporate a variety of architectural styles to break it down "to a human scale," he said.

The roughly 124 units, most with one or two bedrooms, also would allow the developer to set aside 10 percent as "workforce or affordable" housing, Heapes said.

Several people in the audience immediate-



Courtesy of Street Sense

Architects depict a lively streetscape along Wisconsin Avenue.

ly objected to the proposed height, number of units, and the cars the new owners would inevitably drive.

"It looks beautiful, but I can't find anybody who favors 135 new residential units," said Richard Rothblum, the newly elected advisory neighborhood commissioner for the area. "Like everybody else, I want to see this before I die, but I'm just a little concerned that to get 13 subsidized houses, you're adding 140 units."

Others expressed concerns about the traffic from the new units and whether a five-story building would block views of the Washington National Cathedral.

Not all agreed. A man in the back of the room said he wanted the new housing, as well as the modernized stores. "Do it faster. The place looks like a disaster now," he said.

Heapes explained the rationale: "You've asked us to mark down rent on retail and office space. We're doing parks and green space. New construction is very expensive. Residential is the one thing we can use to balance out the costs."

Asked if the north building could be smaller if the affordable units were eliminated or located elsewhere, he said, "We want to include 10 percent — that's our druthers. We'd rather do it here."

Colavolpe said "granting the community's wishes for amenities and low rents for existing businesses" drove the decision to build more

housing. "We need four floors for it to be financially feasible. A regular developer would build more," he said, adding that the housing plans are "not set in stone. We can talk about it."

The D.C. Zoning Commission has adopted inclusionary-zoning requirements requiring affordable units in major projects, but the rules at this point do not govern the Giant project, MacWood said.

Other concerns about traffic generated by the entire development are still to be resolved. Traffic consultant Marty Wells said the expanded supermarket and other stores would clearly draw more traffic than the now-"moribund" Giant. But he said most intersections in the area would operate at acceptable levels.

The supermarket would measure 64,860 square feet, more than double the current size, with a pharmacy and other specialty shops inside. Other retail and commercial space on the two blocks would be slightly reduced. The current 278 parking spaces would increase to 488.

The project has its own Web site, wisconsinavegiant.com, with more details and an opportunity to post questions and comments.

Colavolpe said his company hopes to begin the zoning process early next year. If approved, construction could take 18 months to two years, he said, and would be completed in two phases. Plans include demolishing the buildings in the southern block — except for restaurants and stores lining Macomb Street, which Giant does not own — and then rebuilding. Small businesses from the north block could relocate there while the north parcel is rebuilt.

George Idelson, president of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association, said his group has not endorsed the plan. But he was "encouraged and inspired" by the presentation, Idelson said, noting that other community meetings have devolved into "screaming matches. There's a lot of support [for this]," he said. "The neighborhood will speak, and when we get through, we'll have a wonderful project."