

## **A New Supermarket for Mt. Airy**

### **Position Paper on the Proposal for a New Acme Supermarket In Our Community**

#### **Wet Mt. Airy Neighbors**

Mt. Airy needs and deserves a new, first-class supermarket. Why?

- A supermarket in our community is a necessity for neighborhood residents, especially those who come to the existing Acme by foot or by bus.
- Mt. Airy has the buying power to support a new first-class super market. Today, a majority of Mt. Airy residents do their grocery shopping elsewhere—often outside the city—where they have access to new stores that, unlike the current Acme in Mt. Airy, are clean, well-designed, stocked with fresh food, staffed by trained employees, and able to provide many of the services found in the best contemporary supermarkets.
- Not only will a new first-class supermarket be a much better place to shop, it will also stimulate other business activity in the historic Germantown Avenue commercial corridor.
- A new store can create many new well paid, unionized jobs for the residents of Mt. Airy.

The community organizations of Mt. Airy are determined to bring such a supermarket to our neighborhood. Over a year ago, Acme Markets first put forward a proposal for a new supermarket for Mt. Airy. In the last year, the community organizations of Mt. Airy have been working to encourage Acme to improve their plan. The most recent plan put forward by Acme meets some of our expectations. Yet, despite our enthusiasm for a new supermarket in Mt. Airy, and our appreciation of Acme's recognition of the commercial opportunity open to them here, we have serious objections to their current proposal

The fundamental question for us is the location of the new store.

- Acme proposes to place a new grocery store in a wooded lot that is now zoned for residential use and that abuts a large number of homes on Sedgwick Street and Mower Avenue.
- Our position as community organizations in Mt. Airy is:
  - First, a new supermarket would best contribute to the overall commercial revitalization of Germantown Avenue and to the commercial streetscape of Mt. Airy by being placed on Germantown Avenue. The location of the building in the current Acme proposal makes access to the store more difficult for pedestrians and bus riders. The view from Germantown Avenue will be of a large parking lot, rather than an inviting store. Acme has proposed a suburban plan inappropriate to Mt. Airy's historic, urban environment.
  - Second, a supermarket in the location proposed by Acme would destroy a potentially attractive wooded area, dramatically reduce the buffer between commercial activity and the near neighbors of the store, require a zoning change, and violate a commitment to the neighborhood that was made when the site was originally developed.

Acme Markets claims that, for financial and other reasons, they cannot put the proposed store any place other than in the wooded lot. While we have listened to Acme's changing reasons for this conclusion, we remain unconvinced. Before we can agree to Acme's proposal, we must hear a substantial and detailed explanation of why it is impossible to build a new store on Germantown Avenue. If the difficulties of putting a store in this location involve construction and other expenses, we expect Acme to share with us their cost estimates so that we can evaluate their claims fully and fairly.

Since, as we detail below, the current Acme proposal fails to address several basic issues that would prevent its approval by regulatory bodies in the city, this is an appropriate time for Acme to work with us to seriously evaluate the various alternatives open for a new store.

We reiterate that we very much want Acme to build a new store in our community. And we are prepared to support their proposed location if, after a thorough review, we are convinced that there is no alternative. But we do not believe Acme can expect our support for a proposal that is not clearly best for either the community as a whole, or the near neighbors, without engaging with us in honest, open, and extensive consideration of all reasonable alternatives to it.

Even if Acme Markets were to convince us that there is no reasonable alternative to placing the store in the wooded lot, several other community concerns must be addressed by Acme to ensure support from the Mt. Airy community:

1. All health and safety concerns of the community must be satisfied. Informal analyses of the current proposal by local residents and by officials in the City Planning Commission have raised serious concerns. Acme plans to have large trucks back into loading bays from Sedgwick Street even though current Street Department regulations for new construction state that such maneuvering of commercial vehicles may not take place on city streets. This feature of the plan will block an important thoroughfare in our community much of the day. It will interfere with a route frequently used by the fire engines from the Mt. Airy station and obstruct the emergency entrance of the Germantown Home. It will create hazards for children who use a school bus stop near the proposed loading bays, who walk on Sedgwick Street to the library or playground, as well for those who live on the block. In addition, the noise and exhaust fumes from the trucks on Sedgwick Street will create a terrible nuisance for many near neighbors, one that is likely to dramatically diminish their property values. Acme must revise their plan so that all trucks move off Sedgwick Avenue before backing into the loading bays. To insure that the loading and unloading of trucks does not disturb the neighbors, we also expect Acme to keep to its agreement to limit the hours during which such operations will take place.
2. In addition to problem with the location of the loading bays, we believe that the entrance to parking lot closest to Germantown Avenue also violates current city code for new construction. We expect Acme to revise its plans to meet all current city codes.
3. We oppose the use of this site for a gas station or fueling bays. Gas pumps, under any name, will create traffic problems, potential environmental hazards, and nuisance conditions for the near neighbors. There are other sites in our community that are much better suited for a new gas station. We are willing to work with Acme to help them find such a location.

4. We are concerned that new development in the wooded lot could create water drainage and settlement problems for the near neighbors. It is also possible that a properly designed development could ameliorate the difficulties the neighbors currently face. We expect Acme to submit detailed proposals for dealing with these problems for evaluation by independent experts and to abide by the reasonable conclusions of these experts.
5. It is critical to the future of the streetscape of Germantown Avenue that the additional (or, in the current jargon, pad) store or stores proposed by Acme be built on the Avenue, with the front of these stores facing the street. It is also important that we bring new kinds of businesses to our community rather than duplicating those already found here. To insure local community control over this important project, we want Acme to lease the land for the pad site to Mt. Airy USA for development.
6. The design of the new building and associated signage should be respectful of the Germantown Avenue historic district. We are pleased that Acme has agreed that there will be no sign on the side of the building facing Sedgwick Street. A large, freestanding sign looming over the corner would not be appropriate on this site.

We note that most of these problems would not arise if Acme were to agree to place the new store on Germantown Avenue.

We hope and believe that after continuing discussions and negotiations a revised proposal can be created that serves the interests of both Mt. Airy and Acme Markets. We can create a store that will serve the neighborhood, be profitable for Acme, and contribute to the development of a vibrant, commercial corridor, on historic Germantown Avenue. We reiterate that we want to work with, and not against, Acme Markets. However, should that prove impossible, and should Acme decide to close and sell their current store, we expect Acme to give organizations or people in the local community the right of first refusal on the site. By doing so, we can insure that, if not Acme, then another company will build the kind of supermarket Mt. Airy needs and deserves.