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Council OKs Target project

Target Corp. won the right to expand its Midway store Wednesday when the St. Paul City Council voted unanimously to approve the project after weeks of delays.

During last-minute negotiations, the Minneapolis-based retailer agreed to significantly alter the design of the Twin Cities' first urban SuperTarget. The parking lot will be divided with tree-lined walkways, a new road and bike path will run parallel to University Avenue, and a variety of building materials — including glass — will be used to make the 186,000-square-foot store more visually appealing.

The issue evolved into a proxy fight for the future of University Avenue. With the potential for a light-rail transit line, everyone from the mayor to community groups wants more pedestrian-friendly development there, and Target's plans were attacked as a sprawling, suburban-style box.

Although Target had little to gain, representatives agreed to sit down with Council Members Jay Benanav and Debbie Montgomery and tweak their plans. The new design now includes bike racks and a new bus stop along Hamline Avenue, and the company has agreed to sell lots fronting University Avenue for further development.

The company will demolish the former Four Points by Sheraton hotel, located behind its current store at Hamline and University avenues. The current store will remain open until next summer, a few months before the SuperTarget is completed. It will then be torn down to make way for the parking lot. The project is expected to cost $30 million and could add more than 100 jobs at the Midway location.

Not everyone is happy with the outcome. The SuperTarget will sell groceries, and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 789 organizer Bernie Hesse said Target, which is not unionized, may cost union jobs at nearby Cub Foods and Rainbow Foods.

Local 789 was one of three groups to appeal the Planning Commission's approval of the project. The community planning group University United, a strong proponent of transit-oriented development, was another.

— Jason Hoppin

SuperTarget is a go for St. Paul
Jackie Crosby, Star Tribune

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In the not-so-distant future, St. Paul shoppers won't have to make separate stops to pick up both milk and bath towels.

After weeks of wrangling, protests and fierce negotiations, the St. Paul City Council on Wednesday gave Target Corp. the green light to build the first urban SuperTarget in Minnesota.

The 186,000-square-foot megastore, which will include a supermarket, will be built on a former hotel site next door to the standard-sized Target at University and Hamline Avenues in the Midway area. That store will be razed and turned into a parking lot, and the new store could open by July 2008.

The $30 million project has been a source of controversy for weeks, as the council pondered an appeal of a 180-space parking variance and the overall site plan.

Neighborhood groups fought for a multi-story building with housing and a parking deck, which they argued would better complement the city's "transit-oriented development" goals along the proposed Central Corridor light-rail transit line.

Because Target owns the land and isn't seeking a subsidy, the city had little leverage to coax the Minneapolis-based retailer into adapting its big-box design to the urban setting. But after weeks of negotiations led by Council Members Jay Benanav and Debbie Montgomery, Target made several design changes that appeased some neighborhood activists.

The new design includes rows of trees throughout the parking lot, as well as a covered walkway and bike path from a nearby bus stop.

"For the first time, a national chain has come in here and made a real gesture of concern about pedestrians and transit. That's very, very important," said Brian McMahon, executive director of University United, one of the parties who appealed the zoning variance and site plan.

The other appellant, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 789, had pushed Target for higher-paying union jobs in its grocery store so as not to undercut unionized workers at nearby Cub and Rainbow supermarkets.

But all Target agreed to was to keep the 140 current employees when the SuperTarget opens, and to try to fill the additional new jobs -- some 200 to 350 -- from the neighborhood.

Bernie Hesse, an organizer with Local 789, called Target a "villain" that "bought leaders' silence" with a pledge to contribute at least $200,000 to St. Paul's community-based policing program.

"Today my folks got offered up so people can have cheap goods," said Hesse. "[The council] could have showed leadership. They could have said, 'This ain't good enough. Why is the Midway always getting crumbs?' "

All seven City Council members approved plans for the SuperTarget.

The 15.9-acre site includes the former Four Points Sheraton. Target bought the hotel and land from the St. Paul Port Authority last year, a transaction that put more than 100 hotel workers out of work.

Target plans to split off 3.2 acres on the northern portion of the site, along University, for other commercial or mixed-use housing developments.

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