

## Urban Grocery

### **(Ambience)**

It's a warm, breezy summer afternoon in Penn Quarter... the sidewalks are alive with people... filled, with hurried office workers, tourist families and local teenagers.

Just a few blocks off Seventh Street Northwest, the main drag in this quickly-growing neighborhood, it's a little quieter. A small group of farmers sell produce, bread and flowers, in a market that's held each Thursday. Because there's no grocery store in this neighborhood, residents like Cheryl Fine make shopping here a weekly habit.

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But the farmer's market is only here once a week, and closes during the winter. Because Fine doesn't have a car, she normally finds herself using public transportation to bring groceries home. **(Ambience)** It's an inconvenience, but one of her only options.

**(Fine)** To put groceries in the train looks ridiculous. People just look at you. If you're going on the buses you have to drag them up the steps. It just is NOT an easy thing!

Residents in Penn Quarter want a real grocery store... And just a few months ago, they thought it might happen, when the Maryland-based grocer Balducci's announced its plan to open a location here. Balducci's leased a space on Seventh Street., and posted a sign to promote its opening. The mere thought of having a grocery store in the neighborhood excited residents, like Fine.

**(Fine)** We were thrilled! That's all we talked about, the groceries... it sounds so silly but, it was BIG NEWS.

Their excitement ended soon after. In April, a *Washington Post* article reported the supermarket pulled out of its deal to build the Penn Quarter store. Residents noticed immediately... the "coming soon" sign was no longer there. So they got creative, and looked directly to the grocer to express their concerns. They started with their computers.

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Jo-Ann Neuhaus, the Executive Director of the Penn Quarter Neighborhood Association, began an email campaign, to urge Balducci's to reconsider their decision.

**(Neuhaus)** We started sending emails to express our concern and our desire to have the store open down here; with the hope that doing that might change some minds.

Neuhaus drafted a sample email to send her contacts at Balducci's, and she invited her neighbors to do the same. For a while, she kept track of her neighbors' participation. But the support was so tremendous, she couldn't keep up.

**(Neuhaus)** I stopped counting there were so many... anywhere between five hundred and a

thousand.

While the emails continue, residents keep each other informed of the developments... by posting on a neighborhood blog.

**(Rosenberg)** The people are being vocal about their opinions on which grocery store would be best and why.

That was Dara Rosenberg, one of several contributors to the blog. As residents continue to discuss the situation online, Cheryl Fine has been contacting several grocers directly.

**(Fine)** I decided to be a little bit pro-active, and I contacted some people on my own.

Fine called several companies, including Trader Joe's, Macgruder's and Ellwood Thompson's. She said everyone seemed interested, but nothing was happening... Penn Quarter residents are frustrated – they say the demand is here, and it's about time a grocery store opens.

**(Rosenberg)** There's enough people in the neighborhood to justify a grocery store. I mean, that's the bottom line.

Neuhaus says her email campaign was successful, and that Balducci's is now reconsidering opening a store in Penn Quarter. But until something happens, residents will continue their plea for a grocer.

**(Fine)** This is a GOLD MINE here. We're condoland dying for groceries. . . Hopefully, by the time the farmer's markets have closed for the season, we can have a grocery! A basic need!

For *Intern Edition*, I'm Daniel Peters in Washington, D.C.