

## Shopping for a new supermarket to replace Montclair's Pathmark



Staff photo by Adam Anik

Inside the Lackawanna Plaza Pathmark, shoppers Pat Wallace, left, and Benny Osborne make orders at the deli counter.

In the wake of The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company's bankruptcy filing, the future of Montclair's Pathmark location in Lackawanna Plaza remains to be seen.

While Acme Markets has already entered into an agreement to purchase the A&P at 510 Valley Road in Montclair, the Lackawanna Pathmark is still among the 150 stores owned by A&P looking for a buyer.

Montclair itself has three other supermarkets, including the soon-to-be Acme A&P, and plenty nearby in Clifton and Bloomfield. Even so, the possible closure of Pathmark would leave Montclair's 3rd and 4th wards without a chain grocer of their own, creating a problem for nearby residents without cars who have long relied on Pathmark's proximity.

Sandra, a Montclair resident and Pathmark shopper who did not provide her last name, said of the possible closure, "I use a cab to get to and from, and if Pathmark closes, it's going to be inconvenient." When asked whether it would be possible to start going to the Shoprite in Bloomfield, Sandra said, "I would if I have money during that time, but when money is scarce it's hard to get there."

She said she pays \$6 for a cab from her house to Lackawanna Plaza, versus the \$15 it would cost to get to Bloomfield.

Another shopper, Jeffrey Dorch of Monroe Place, said he's been shopping at the Lackawanna Pathmark "since it opened," and that the impact of a closure would be "tremendous."

"I don't drive," Dorch noted. "When this is closed down, I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know if a bus goes by [Shoprite]. I think there's one a block away, but that's such a long commute just to get to a shopping area."

Then with shrugged shoulders, he offered, "What are you going to do? Business is business."

Third Ward Township Councilmember Sean M. Spiller considered an increase in shuttle service from Lackawanna Plaza that could bring nearby residents to other grocery stores with similar price-points.

"From our perspective, the goal is to make sure the needs of residents are served," Spiller said. "[We could] create a buy-in where these other stores would offset some of the added costs of new shuttle routes in exchange for increased traffic to their shops."

A representative of Sard Verbinnen & Co, a PR firm hired by A&P, was unable to comment further than the information available on apteanotice.com, a website delineating the parent company's impending shutdown. Residents can check that site's FAQ section for updated lists of A&P, Waldbaum, Pathmark, Best Cellars, Food Basic, Food Emporium and Superfresh locations that have reached purchase agreements with other stores.

Pathmark has occupied its space in Lackawanna Plaza for more than 30 years. According to Spiller, during that time many supermarkets have expanded their offerings.

"Supermarkets look for buildings bigger than the Pathmark is now, so there may be a need to reconfigure the space to make it adaptable to modern supermarkets," Spiller said.

According to John T. Nicollai, the president of United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 424A, it is still too early for alarm.

"We've gone through what we call 'tier one' of the bidding. Now we're going into 'tier two.' Once we go through 'tier two,' we enter into auction, or as some people refer to it, 'the fire sale.'"

"It's not our first ride at the rodeo," said Nicollai, who has dealt with the bankruptcy and closure of sundry major supermarkets, including that of Grand Union years before.

He gets calls daily from supermarket companies entering agreements to buy local marts in the area. Nicollai referred to the cost of constructing a supermarket from the ground up as "astronomical."

It could be anywhere from \$7-\$10 million, considering the lighting, parking and other structural requirements particular to a supermarket. The most cost-effective option is always to buy a building previously inhabited by a grocery store.

Nicollai noted, "After this first round, it's not rational to throw up our hands and say if the store hasn't sold, that it will not be sold."

Expressing his concern for the Pathmark employees, Jeffrey Dorch would like it to be so: "It's not just the community. A lot of people are going to be displaced. There are families that are going to be hurt. So, if the closure is a possibility, hopefully it disappears."

Contact Nicholas Katzban at [katzban@northjersey.com](mailto:katzban@northjersey.com)