

Building permit next step to get Publix in Omni area opened by March 2012

By JACQUELYN WEINER

Now that Publix has inked a lease for an Omni-area site, developer Stiles is seeking a building permit, aiming to break ground by first quarter 2011.

The plan: To be open for business by March 2012, said Robert Breslau, president of Stiles Real Estate Investment Services Group.

Mr. Breslau called it "the right project at the right time."

"We really truly believe that there is a demand today" for a grocery store in that neighborhood, he said. "We're very confident that when we get it open, it's going to be a very successful center."

Located at 1776 Biscayne Blvd., the 49,200-square-foot supermarket would be the first major grocer in the Omni area.

Downtown's residential population has continued to rise as condo towers fill, creating the need for more area dining and services.

According to a March study commissioned by the Miami Downtown Development Authority, occupancy in new condominiums jumped from the 62% recorded in a June 2009 study to 74%.

Of those, 1,449 units in completed new condominium buildings fall in the Media and Entertainment District area of downtown Miami, which is where the planned Publix would rise. The authority divides downtown into seven districts.

The district is fifth lowest of the seven in number of new units, followed by the West Brickell and South Brickell areas.

Tops is Brickell, with 8,637 units.

Mr. Breslau said there are "just under 2,000 residential units within a thousand feet" of the development.

The Publix is to anchor a three-story, 57,200-square foot retail center on Biscayne between Northeast 17th Terrace and 18th Street. The developer is South Florida-based commercial real estate firm Stiles.

Wells Fargo Bank is financing the project, according to a news release.

The center, coined Publix at 18Biscayne, is to house about 8,000 square feet of retail space facing Biscayne Boulevard.

As for parking, 296 spaces are planned, with 23 at the street level, 143 on level two and 130 on level three.

A Publix liquor store is planned for 1,470 square feet of the Biscayne-facing retail space.

In addition, Stiles is in negotiations with a national bank branch for 3,200 square feet.

The remaining 3,300 square feet, divided into three spaces, is still available.

Mr. Breslau said Stiles aims to add service and restaurant tenants like outdoor cafes to provide

for the growing residential population in "an underserved market."

That's the same thinking Publix had in expanding to Omni, said spokeswoman Kim Jaeger.

"There is tremendous growth residentially in that area," Ms. Jaeger said. "We think that is going to continue."

In addition, she said, Publix hopes to target area business people looking to pop in or grab a quick lunch.

While the store is still in the design phase, Ms. Jaeger said there will probably be new features.

One for certain is a cart conveyer system, she said, which will be the first in any South Florida Publix.

Other area stores have belts shoppers can ride with their carts, but the Biscayne Boulevard store is to have a conveyor system just for carts, flanked on either side by escalators.

Other features include a pharmacy and café with outdoor seating — one of a handful in South Florida.

Ms. Jaeger said Publix won't begin hiring until two or three months before opening, but stores typically have 100-150 employees.

Before the project can break ground, Stiles must obtain a building permit from the City of Miami.

Mr. Breslau said construction designs are being finished to submit for the permit.

The city has already approved a Class II Special Permit, which was OK'd Aug. 9 with conditions.

Class II Special Permits are required "prior to approval of any permit affecting the location, relocation or alteration of any structure, sign, awning, landscaping, parking, area or vehicular way visible from a public street," according to city documents.

The permit's conditions require the applicant to provide a construction-parking plan, construction noise-management plan and enforcement policies for both.

The permitting process started to take shape in March when Publix applied for a Class II permit from Miami.

The city planning department's Urban Development Review Board reviewed design plans and the permit request in June.

The Class II permit approval cleared the way to seek a building permit, said Luciana González, assistant to the planning department director.

Once the city's building department gives the final OK, she said, construction can begin.

The closest Publix to the planned store is at 4870 Biscayne Blvd.

On the other side of the Miami River, the rapidly growing supermarket chain has successfully opened three Brickell-area stores within blocks of each other.



New Publix is to have 8,000 SF of other retail space facing Biscayne Blvd, including a bank.