



City Councilmember Laketa Cole is surrounded by Avondale community leaders and residents Monday in front of Aldi grocery store in Avondale Towne Center as she expresses concerns about the proposed closing next year of the store.

By Dan Yount
The Cincinnati Herald

Community leaders and residents expressed their concerns Tuesday about the proposed closing of the Aldi grocery store in Avondale Towne Center at a meeting Monday in front of the store on Reading Road.

Although Aldi's lease with the center expires at the end of the year, company officials have agreed to keep the store open until the summer of 2008 to allow the center owners opportunity to obtain another grocer for their space there, said Rev. Clarence Wallace, chairman of Avondale Coalition of Churches, which owns and operates the center.

Aldi announced last week it would be closing the store with plans to open another store in the community in a freestanding location.

Tamika Wheeler, who lives near the store, said she shops there often to take advantage of the marked down food prices. "This store is really good for low-income people in the area, and for people who cannot get to other grocery stores," she said.

Councilmember Laketa Cole, who called the press conference in conjunction with the Center for Closing the Health Gap and community leaders on Monday, said the continued flight of quality food sources from low-income urban communities don't continue. "If left unchecked, this flight will result in a full-blown health crisis that threatens not only urban centers such as Avondale but residents in every corner of the City of Cincinnati," she said.

This is not Avondale's problem alone, Cole said, pointing to studies of retail redlining across the country of grocery stores carrying healthy foods and fresh produce and pharmacies in low-income communities of color.

"Given this information and the widespread nature of obesity and its adverse health conditions because of the ready availability of fresh vegetables and fruits, it becomes obvious why we need to reverse the trend that shows grocery stores fleeing urban areas," Cole said. "We must draw attention to this devastating trend and the consequences that it holds for families in Avondale. Communities like Avondale need access to the same quality of food that other citizens of this city have access to everyday. We must do what we can do to put an end to stores that come into the community and build up their wealth on the backs of low-income residents, and then move to more affluent higher-income neighborhoods."

Dwight Tillery, president and CEO of Closing the Health Gap, said the absence of the store provides even more serious health consequences for residents left behind. "Avondale is made a captive of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, with residents having a lack of fresh vegetables and fruit which results in obesity and greater risk of heart problems, cancer and diabetes," he said.

Tillery called on food and pharmacy companies to be more socially responsible in serving low-income areas. He pointed to a national study that indicates race is a factor in companies leaving the core areas of America's cities.

Patricia Milton, president of the Avondale Community Council, noted that while many great things are occurring in Avondale such as the planned Burnet Revitalization Project, the health of the community's residents is a top priority of the council.

Cole noted the recent closing of Walgreen's Drug Store across the street, and the opening of Aldi stores in the newer, more affluent suburbs.