

METRO NEWS

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They say uh-oh to Costco



East River Plaza site will house a new Costco that wants to keep trucks rolling overnight. But resident Connie Camacho (inset, with sons Casey and Steven), is concerned about added exhaust fumes. Photos by Michael Schwartz (above), David Handschuh/Daily News

Residents worry that new East Harlem store's overnight trucks will worsen asthma rates

BY AISHA AL-MUSLIM
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

IT'S BEING SEEN as part of a development and job boom for East Harlem.

But a new Costco is also creating concerns in a community with some of the highest asthma rates in the city.

The local community board cleared the way by approving a controversial special permit that will allow overnight deliveries to the big-box store.

Supporters cheered the deal, saying the warehouse club chain giant will bring jobs and business to East River Plaza, a planned three-block shopping center slated to open this year.

"This is an opportunity for people to be employed and an opportunity for us to monitor the employment," said Cesar Ortiz, a Community Board 11 member.

The community board ap-

proved the plan over the objections of some residents, who contend that bringing more fume-spewing trucks to the area would add to health problems in a neighborhood where one in four children suffer from asthma.

"This construction is really trashing this community," said Gwen Goodwin, a City Council candidate. "Everyone in East Harlem needs a good quality of life."

The special permit will allow truck deliveries between midnight and 5 a.m. to the store, being built on the site of the old Washburn Wire Factory.

Costco is among four major retailers set to occupy the five-level East River Plaza, rising along the FDR Drive between 116th and 119th Sts.

Target, Best Buy and Marshall's also plan to set up shop in the mall, which is expected to open in November and include 1,248 parking spaces.

The developer, Tiago Holdings, argued that Costco needs the permit to stock its 20-foot-high shelves during non-business hours to ensure customer safety.

While Community Board 11 okayed the permit, the Department of City Planning needs to sign off.

Costco is expected to create 400 new jobs, with an average pay of \$18.63 per hour.

Community Board 11 Chairman Robert Rodriguez said Tiago agreed to provide \$350,000 for a local nonprofit group to help meet the board's 75% local resident hiring goal.

"This was the only reason we could move ahead with the special permit," Rodriguez said.

Board member Matthew Washington opposed the permit, which passed by a 29-10 vote.



"Nobody is against job creation, but there are many health concerns," he said.

A Costco spokeswoman declined comment.

Connie Camacho, 50, who lives next to the new shopping mall site, said everyone in her family has asthma. "My main concern is what they are going to do to keep the air clean," she said.

Tiago is offering to provide soundproofed windows and air conditioners to some nearby residents. The developer also agreed to donate \$150,000 to an asthma

prevention program and \$100,000 to the East Harlem Go Green Initiative.

Still, Tony Donovan, 38, who lives in the Pleasant Ave. apartment building he owns, plans to move with his pregnant wife to New Jersey, so they won't have to raise a child in an area with high pollution. Now, his main concern is the local school children.

"We are now going to allow trucks to idle outside where children are outside," Donovan said. "How does the community benefit?"

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