



The Closing of Stop & Shop: What's Happening? Frequently Asked Questions

OVERVIEW

The Stop & Shop grocery store located at 424 Raritan Avenue has informed its landlord that they would not be renewing their lease, which is set to expire in June of 2023. This is obviously a detriment to the Highland Park community and something that the Mayor and Borough Council take very seriously. The following are answers to some of the common questions we've received about what is going on and what the Borough is doing to address the situation. This document will be updated periodically with additional information as it is available.

WHY IS STOP & SHOP CLOSING?

During our discussions with company the primary reason cited for leaving is the comparatively small size of the store relative to their other locations. The Stop & Shop business model is based on a store footprint that is two or even three times the size of the Highland Park store. It was clear in these discussions that the current store was profitable, but not as profitable as larger stores.

WHEN WILL STOP & SHOP CLOSE?

It is our understanding that the current lease ends in June of 2023. However, there is a strong possibility that the store will close a few months before that to allow time to reassign workers to other stores as well as prepare the building for vacancy. The Borough has asked Stop & Shop to stay open as long as possible.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER STOP & SHOP CLOSES?

The honest answer is that there will be a time period where Highland Park is without a local grocery store. How long that time period will be is unknown and depends on a number of factors. The Borough has expressed in unequivocal terms that our preference is that the space be used for a supermarket above any other potential use.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN WITH THE STOP & SHOP PROPERTY?

The Stop & Shop property is owned by a family with long-term ties to Highland Park. They understand the importance of having a supermarket on the property. They have expressed a strong desire to work with the Borough to provide the best use possible for the site. At the current time, we are working on two parallel tracks.

TRACK ONE is to try and get a new supermarket tenant in the existing facility. The facility is old and a new tenant will likely require upgrades to it before moving in. There has been some interest from other supermarkets but nothing definitive at this time. The borough is working closely with Middlesex County and state officials to identify what sort of support and incentives are available to attract a new tenant. In addition, the Borough is working with the property owner and others to develop a prospect list of grocery stores that would be a good fit for Highland Park based on our location and demographics. The advantage

of this track is it likely gets some kind of grocery store in the space sooner. However, there will be a gap in grocery store coverage as the leasing process for a store such as this takes time and there will also be a need for significant renovations. It is unclear if there is a supermarket willing to go this route.

TRACK TWO is redevelopment of the entire site, incorporating a new grocery store as an anchor use in the new development. Last year, after a thorough [study of the area](#) and Planning Board review, the Borough Council declared the Stop & Shop site and adjacent parcels as a [non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment](#). The next step is the preparation of a redevelopment plan, which has already been authorized and is underway, that will help incentivize a grocery store use on the site among other things. The advantage of this approach is that, if successful, there would likely be an entirely new and upgraded supermarket facility, reconfigured parking, housing and perhaps other uses and facilities on the site. The disadvantage is that this could extend the time that the Borough would be without a supermarket.

WHAT IS THE BOROUGH DOING TO HELP RESIDENTS WHEN STOP & SHOP CLOSSES?

The Borough recognizes and understands that the absence of a supermarket will be difficult for many residents. We are particularly concerned about people without transportation, older residents, as well as individuals and families with limited income. To address this, we are developing a number of strategies that we hope to deploy when Stop & Shop closes. At this time, we cannot promise that these will all happen, but we are working diligently on these specific fronts.

- *Shuttle Buses:* One possibility is to provide regular shuttle bus service from Highland Park to another local supermarket. These could run two or three days a week, making a few trips each day.
- *Expanding access to existing food programs:* The Highland Park Community Food Pantry (HPCFP) and Highland Park Gives a Hoot are two organizations that currently work to alleviate food insecurity in our community. We are working with county and state officials to see ways we can support expansion of those services during the gap in supermarket coverage. Additionally, the Highland Park Farmers Market, which runs on Fridays from April to December each year, will continue to serve as an important fresh food resource for residents. The market accepts vouchers from the HPCFP, St. Peter's and SNAP and they are contemplating an earlier start to the season this year, possibly as soon as mid-February.
- *Other transportation options:* We are exploring ways to lower costs for taxis and other driving services for HP residents to and from other local grocery stores.
- *Provide training and access to online delivery platforms:* There is no substitution for shopping in local stores. However, today many people use online ordering and delivery platforms for groceries. Unfortunately, for people without regular computer access or computer skills these platforms are out of reach. One possibility we are exploring is to provide technical assistance to people in using and managing online grocery delivery.

CONCLUSION

The loss of Stop & Shop is significant to our community. The Mayor, Borough Council, and all professional economic development staff are working diligently to solve this problem as soon as possible. We are open to new and different ideas from the community. If you have an idea you would like to share, please feel free to contact Teri Jover, Borough Administrator & Redevelopment Director, at tjover@hpboro.com or at 732-819-3789.