



JIM GENSHEIMER — MERCURY NEWS

East Palo Alto residents Norma Chipres and her son, Edgar, 12, share headphones as they listen in Spanish to Sunday's prayer vigil for a supermarket. There is no full-service grocery within city limits.

VIGIL | E. Palo Alto residents want grocery

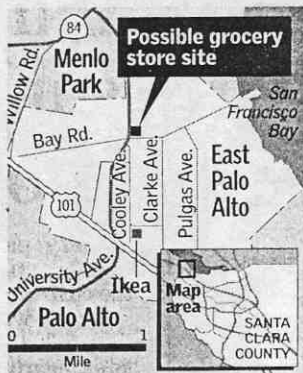
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ket complex said it wanted to sell its site at University Avenue and Bay Road to the highest bidder. The announcement potentially jeopardized a deal the city was trying to craft with Grupo Gigante, a Mexican retail powerhouse, to operate a full-service grocery on the site.

Alarmed, the city council hired a consultant to negotiate sale of the land to the city. On Tuesday, city staff will ask the council to extend the consultant's contract for another three months.

"With a whole lot of prayer and a lot of residents turning out, the 90 days will be enough," said the Rev. Floyd Purdy of the Faith Missionary Baptist Church. "This community cannot afford to wait any longer."

"It's about time for something to be done," agreed Herminio Rodriguez, a resident who attended the vigil. Rodriguez, who has lived in East Palo Alto for a decade, said he is tired of driving to



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Safeway.

Others led prayers for developers and the city council.

"I pray, God, for honest motives, for pure motives," intoned Pastor Clifton Bennett of Walls of Faith Ministries. "I pray for the developers that when they break ground it won't be for their benefit but for the benefit of the residents of the city."

The ministers, who came together at the vigil as the Community Ministerial Alliance of East Palo Alto, laid out a practical timetable that would lead to a grand opening within 15 to 20 months.

Called to speak, Mayor David Woods told the crowd he did not think the timetable was realistic, but he encouraged continued community participation. Woods said other demands put forward by the group of ministers and by Peninsula Interfaith Action and Youth United for Community Action were similar to city plans.

Among the community demands is that at least 30 percent of prospective grocery jobs would go to East Palo Alto residents, regardless of police record. Residents also said they want first leasing rights for local entrepreneurs in the plaza surrounding the supermarket and a plan to offer equity shares in the proposed site to residents.

"The time is now for the vision of the people of this city to come to pass," said the Rev. Albert Macklin IV, in a closing prayer. "God, give them a heart for you people, bring to the city what benefits us, your people."

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