

Smart & Final to take over Save Mart slated for closure

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Smart & Final plans to take over the Save Mart that's [slated to close](#) at Blackstone and Clinton avenues in central Fresno.

The retailer will open its "Smart & Final Extra!" format geared toward both average families and businesses.

It's a change from the retailer's [previous plans](#) to build a new store at the southwest corner of the same intersection across the street from Save Mart.

Those plans turned into a dispute between the city and the retailer over the design of the corner as it related to the city's new general plan. Smart & Final [gave up on the site](#) in March.

Mayor Ashley Swearingin announced Wednesday during the State of the City address that Smart & Final would lease the closing Save Mart across the street. Save Mart owns the property.

Smart & Final confirmed the new location, but did not give an opening date.

The store will be similar to two Smart & Final Extra! stores — one on West Shaw Avenue and one on Blackstone Avenue — that have the chain's new format. Unlike the traditional Smart & Final stores that cater to businesses or organizations buying in large quantities, the new store also caters to families doing their weekly grocery shopping.

It will feature a full produce section, expanded meat section, bulk foods and organic and natural sections.

News earlier this week that the Save Mart would close June 27 due to competition inspired frustration and outrage in the central Fresno neighborhood, with residents saying they don't have many other places to shop.

The closure was especially disheartening because residents are losing a nearby Vons store. That company is [closing two stores](#): one on Blackstone and Holland avenues and another Vons at First Street and Nees Avenue.

Though the mayor celebrated the new Smart & Final, City Council Member Clint Olivier, who represents the area, said this isn't a victory for the neighborhood. The southwest corner of Clinton and Blackstone still has four acres of empty buildings.

"While I welcome Smart & Final, this is ho hum," he said. "That's a neighborhood that had hope. Because the city of Fresno took too long, we still have blight."

Smart & Final's original plans would have torn down those buildings, including the former Happy Steak, and rebuilt a 28,000-square-foot store on the site. The company also planned to build several smaller retail buildings, one slated to be a restaurant.

But the Swearingin administration wanted the two smaller buildings to front Blackstone Avenue. Smart & Final, wanting its store to be seen from the street, wanted only one along Blackstone.

City Hall said its preference would fit with the city's general plan to be more pedestrian friendly.

At the State of the City address Wednesday, Swearingin addressed Olivier's disappointment about the plans falling through in March before announcing plans for the new location.

“We know how frustrating this is, but sometimes that’s just the way the development process goes,” she said. “These things can take a little time, but don’t give up hope.”

Olivier and Swearingin publicly pecked at each other on Twitter Wednesday afternoon.

Said Olivier: “Smart&final going into existing building because it’s impossible to build new on Blackstone ave. the general plan is an epic failure.”

Said the mayor: “I’m curious why you are having a hard time being happy about this private investment.”

She also added in a tweet that there is “development interest in the other corner.”

Staff writer John Ellis contributed to this report.

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