

# Move to replace Ahart's off to a fast start

The Bethlehem Gadfly Southside March 18, 2021

 *The latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

*“We have 500 signatures and counting,”  
Anna Smith*

The Mayor and City Council president Waldron lead off Tuesday's City Council meeting by immediately assuring everybody in the audience that everybody in the City power structure was already behind the “Ahart” resolution on the agenda and already working on a replacement grocery store.

Calling in were Fountain Hill Board member **Will Rufe**, Bethlehem Food Co-Op officer **Heather Terrible**, Mayoral candidate **Dana Grubb** (reminding that Covid relief funds might be applicable), petition co-organizer (with Veronica Moore) **Anna Smith**, resident **Delia Morrero**, resident and City Council candidate **Rachel Leon**, and resident and Lehigh staff member **Carolina Hernandez**.

Anna Smith announced that “We have 500 signatures and counting” on the **petition letter** to the Mayor and City Council. (What a network!)

Followers will find Dana Grubb's “**Replacing Ahart's Grocery Store**” Facebook post quite interesting. Lots of relevant facts and info there.

The move to save a crucial grocery source in the west Southside is off and running nicely.



Securing a new southside Bethlehem grocery store

Rachel Leon, Veronica Moore, and Anna Smith stand near Ahart's Market located on Southside Bethlehem. Community Action Development Corp. of Bethlehem sent out an online petition to take action to secure a new southside grocery store. (April Gamiz)

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*selections from Christina Tatu, "Bethlehem officials searching for grocery to replace Ahart's Market." Morning Call, March 16, 2021.*

Bethlehem officials are actively working to find a replacement for Ahart's Market in south Bethlehem, an area already known as a "food desert" which will become even more starved for fresh fruit and vegetables should the community grocery store close its doors at the end of next month.

A resolution was introduced during Tuesday's City Council meeting urging city administrators to investigate incentives that would keep a grocery store operating at Ahart's 410 Montclair Ave. location. The resolution, sponsored by Councilman William Reynolds and Councilwoman Olga Negrón, comes about a week after the store announced it will close its doors by April 30.

Mayor Robert Donchez said city officials have been investigating feasible incentives for continuing operation of a grocery store there since the closure was announced.

“I support council’s resolution and we are already investigating all options for incentivizing a new grocery store at this location. We are prepared to work with the right tenant to offer all the tools in the toolbox,” Donchez said.

He announced Tuesday that the city has arranged for the Kellyn Foundation to increase healthy food access in Bethlehem. With financial assistance from the city’s Community Development Block Grant COVID funds, the Kellyn Foundation will be adding another day or two to its current “Eat Real Food” Mobile Market, which already makes a stop in the South Side.

Since Ahart’s announced its closing, city officials have also connected with the property owner and put them in contact with potential grocery tenants, Donchez said. His administration is also working with LANTA to identify South Side bus routes that residents can use to access other grocers around the city.

They are also working with the Community Action Development Corporation of Bethlehem and the SouthSide Arts District to map out existing fresh food options and publicize them to residents, Donchez said.

Residents Anna Smith and Veronica Moore [started a petition](#) that’s being circulated by the CADCB urging city officials to ensure a grocery store remains at the Montclair Avenue location. As of Tuesday evening, Smith said the petition had more than 500 signatures.

“This supermarket is an essential institution on the South Side and provides access to food for 25% of the South Side population that would not otherwise have walkable access to a supermarket,” says letter circulated with the petition.

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