

# A grocery store at Center and Dewberry?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Neighborhoods, Northside July 7, 2020

 *Latest post in a series on neighborhoods* 

Developer Abe Atiyeh has been pitching proposals for 1838 Center St. (Center and Dewberry) for more than a decade. His latest is for a grocery store by the German chain Lidl.

How would a grocery at this location relate to the Bethlehem Food Co-Op that is comin' down the pike too?

*from Christina Tatu, "Grocery store Lidl could replace controversial plans for psychiatric hospital in Bethlehem." Morning Call, July 6, 2020.*

Plans for a Lidl grocery store could replace a controversial psychiatric hospital proposed in Bethlehem, but the change depends on an amendment to the city's zoning, said Developer Abe Atiyeh.

Atiyeh has been fighting with Bethlehem zoners for more than a decade over a 5-acre grassy property at 1838 Center St., near Bethlehem Catholic High School. Another proposal for the site included a four-story, 125-unit apartment complex, but neither the hospital or apartments are allowed under the property's institutional zoning.

The zoning, which allows for hospitals and medical offices, prohibits grocery stores as well, but Atiyeh is pressing forward with this latest plan, saying a grocery store by the German chain Lidl would serve a need in the community. He will present a petition to City Council on Tuesday night to get the zoning changed.

City Council will refer Atiyeh's request to the City Planning Commission and Lehigh Valley Planning Commission for their recommendations, said Darlene Heller, city director of planning and zoning. When City Council receives recommendations from both commissions, it will hold a public hearing before voting on the change.

Atiyeh said he's been in negotiations with Lidl for two months after the company reached out to express interest in the site.

A representative from Lidl didn't return a request for comment Monday. The closest food market is Azar Supermarket, about 2.5 miles away on Linden Street.

"I think it's a perfect use. People can walk there and it won't generate a lot of traffic. There's a void in this market for groceries," Atiyeh said.

Bethlehem City Council President Adam Waldron said he would reserve comment until he hears Atiyeh's presentation.

"Obviously, that's been a pretty contentious property over the years and there's been a lot of neighborhood input," Waldron said Monday.