

LOCAL NEWS

'We lost everything': Campus Village Shoppes closure stuns business owners

Katharine Wilson · September 11, 2023

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Campus Village Shoppes on April 19, 2023. (Giuseppe LoPiccolo/The Diamondback)

Campus Village Shoppes on Route 1 in College Park is largely shutting down by the end of September to make way for a new mixed-use development, leaving some minority-owned and small business owners devastated and shocked.

LV Collective, a Texas-based real estate company, purchased the property in 2022. The shopping center will be turned into an apartment complex with retail space, according to an LV Collective spokesperson. Most businesses in Campus Village Shoppes were told to shut down by the end of this month after receiving a 60-day notice in August.

The company has not submitted its Detailed Site Plan for the new design to Prince George's County or to College Park, according to a development update from the city. The project is estimated to cost \$150 million, the update said.

Construction is slated to begin in early 2024, but LV Collective is waiting on county and city approval to start demolition.

Leon Sims, the owner of Main Event Barbershop, said he was devastated by the news and is looking to find a new location nearby.

“This is my livelihood. Right now, we have nowhere to go and no one’s compensating us either,” Sims said.

Three business owners told The Diamondback they knew about plans for eventual construction when LV Collective purchased the property, but were told their businesses wouldn’t have to close until early-to-mid-2024.

But business owners received notice in August they had until Sept. 30 to shut down.

[Purple Line, new basketball center among current campus construction projects]

Certain businesses like College Park Liquors have until the end of December to close. The liquor store’s owners said their older lease requires them to have more notice of shutdowns, hence the later date.

Keith Bouchelion, a part-owner of Laser Essential, is grappling with having to leave by the end of this month. Bouchelion said he started making plans for a different location while the center was being sold.

He added that he feels like he’s one of the luckier ones.

“I just hope that everyone is able to recover from being completely ripped out of your home, your livelihood, for some of us the last 10 years and others as they were beginning to venture into entrepreneurship,” Bouchelion said.

Since LV Collective purchased the property, Bouchelion said the shopping center has seen a decline, with infrequent trash pick-up, people loitering and unfulfilled repair requests.

While some businesses are being asked to come back to the property after the remodel, Bouchelion said other minority-owned businesses and small businesses in the center — like College Park Liquors and Vape Exchange — are left out of this deal.

“This place is turning into a corporate campus,” Bouchelion said. “The corporations are getting better breaks than the minority or the small business, and the corporations have more of a leverage than small mom and pop type of operations.”

LV Collective said it is currently in conversations with tenants about which businesses will return to the new development. The company said nearly all tenants agreed to compensation and that it is finishing negotiation with the remaining businesses.

Crowd-favorite College Park Liquors has been in operation for over 30 years and the management said it doesn’t know what will happen next after it finally closes to make way for the new development.

"It'll be a new beginning because we lost everything," Sue Hui, manager of the liquor store, said.

To financially support their employees and hopefully open a new location, College Park Liquors set up a GoFundMe and is working on a raffle.

Hector Hernandez, a manager for Pupuseria La Familiar, said Campus Village Shoppes is one of the largest collections of small businesses in College Park.

His mom and aunt started the immigrant- and family-owned business in 2007.

The Salvadorian restaurant previously struggled because of the recession and the relatively small Latino population in the city, Hernandez said. Eventually, college students started paying attention to the establishment's low prices and good food, and the restaurant introduced a new culture to in and out-of-state students, he said.

Pupuseria La Familiar has other locations in the area, including ones in Wheaton and New Carrollton, that opened after the success of the College Park location. Hernandez said the business is looking to open another location in the city to serve its College Park clientele, but faces high rent prices and other new development in the area.

[College Park City Council delays decision on controversial urban renewal policy]

"It was just kind of a shock when we all got a letter last month," Hernandez said. "It just didn't give us enough time to look elsewhere."

The shopping center is in Lakeland, a historically African-American community where most residents were displaced after the city carried out urban renewal in the 1970s. Bouchelion said the demolition of Campus Village Shoppes represents further erasure of the community to him.

"I don't see how you can be lifting a community up if you're kicking everybody out of it and making it so nobody can afford to live in it," Bouchelion said.

LV Collective said it continues to negotiate with some owners about potential re-leasing and financial compensation.

Michael Williams, College Park's economic development manager, met with some business owners over the past few months to assist with the moving process, according to the city's economic development update.

The update also said the city has a business attraction and retention program, which provides financial and logistical support to business owners as they transition and find new spaces in the city.

For Sims, the barbershop's owner, having to grapple with closing the business he's owned for 10 years has been devastating. But it also reminded him of the support that Main Event Barbershop has garnered from community members over the years.

"I want to thank all the students who have supported us throughout the years. And just really, we appreciate all of you guys," Sims said.