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MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON RECAPS WALGREENS MEETING

Community Leaders Make Appeal to Walgreens

A group of community leaders recently met with top executives from the Walgreens Boots Alliance about their decision to close the Lake Street store in Gary. The store will close today, June 28, 2017. The meeting convened by Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson included national and regional leadership from Walgreens and government and business leaders from Gary, Indiana. Walgreens representatives indicated the decision to cease operations at Lake Street was based on a decade of declining store revenue. While making the decision, they agreed their deliberations had not considered any information relative to the city's development plans for the Lake Street corridor. At the same time, they also stated their decision is final and followed an internal review by many Walgreens officials. Walgreens further acknowledged the need to better engage the local community.

During the meeting local leaders expressed their strong objection to the company's decision to close the Lake Street location. They cited their concern that Walgreens' failure to accept certain insurance and government reimbursement and their failure to carry sufficient quantities of needed medication contributed to the waning business. Mayor Freeman-Wilson, George Rogge, Eric Reaves and Pat Lee laid out the planned development for Lake Street and the surrounding area. Gary representatives also expressed concern for what seemed to be a gradual disinvestment in the city, citing the closure of the Broadway store in Glen Park and the Wabash Street store in the Ambridge neighborhood. There was also discussion about a recent announcement to reduce pharmacy hours at the store on 25th and Grant.

State Representative Charlie Brown expressed the group's frustration that Walgreens did not engage the community and the Indiana General Assembly during the decision-making process. "You come down to the state house all the time, but at no time did you ask for our help because you were not getting sufficient reimbursements to sustain certain stores."

At the conclusion of the meeting, Walgreens agreed to reevaluate the decision to reduce the pharmacy hours at the Grant Street store and to waive any restrictive covenants associated with the Lake Street store lease to allow other pharmacies to locate in the building. The company also agreed to provide a detailed community engagement plan to the group. Further, Walgreens agreed that while all pharmacy records have been transferred to the Lake Station store, Gary citizens previously utilizing the Lake Street store may have prescriptions filled at Walgreens located at 25th & Grant Street.

In the days following the meeting, the group has developed a plan of action that includes exploring the opportunity to secure a new business, supporting continuing local businesses, including the Grant Street Walgreens and fostering better communication with corporate citizens.

Walgreens attendees included Skip Bourdo, Vice President Corporate Operations, Eastern District; Sherrise Trotz, Vice President Chicagoland Operations; John Gremer, Community Affairs; Jada Bush, Regional Healthcare Director; and Donovan Pepper, National Director of Local Government Affairs. In addition to Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson; State Representative Charlie Brown; George Rogge, Miller Business Corporation President; Eric Reaves Miller Citizens Corporation President; and Pat Lee, Lee Companies, local officials in attendance were Ray Grady, Methodist Hospitals' Chief Executive Officer; Kyle Allen, Sr., Lake County Commissioner; Ron Brewer, Gary Councilman-at-large; Roland Walker, Gary Health Commissioner; Karren Lee, Advisory Committee Miller Beach Arts and Creative District; Dr. Vanessa Allen, Urban League NWI; Stephen Mays, Gary NAACP President; Rev. Maurice White, Jr.; and Tammi Davis, Director of Compliance and Policy Engagement, Gary Sanitary District.