



## Coffee shop proposal is grounds for debate

*Straw vote reveals divisions in Wyndhurst*

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Debate over a proposed gourmet coffee and sandwich shop sizzled like a panini in a press during a meeting of the Wyndhurst Improvement Association May 13.

Michael Weinfeld, owner of Wyndhurst Station, wants to lease the old Executive Sweet candy store space in the shopping center as a specialty coffee shop and cafe. Weinfeld is negotiating with a Roland Park couple to operate the eatery.

The cafe would serve bagels, muffins, paninis sandwiches and ice cream. It would not have a commercial kitchen, but a panini press, Weinfeld said.

A 1976 covenant banning food-related businesses in the center could scuttle Weinfeld's plans. Weinfeld wasn't the owner when the communities of Wyndhurst, Blythewood and Roland Park negotiated the covenant. He is now asking the communities to amend it.

And he upped the stakes at the Wyndhurst association meeting, telling residents that he would not proceed with the cafe unless a large majority of the community supports it.

A straw vote at the end of the informational meeting found 14 residents in favor of the amendment and five opposed, but the show of hands belied strong feelings on both sides and one man who said he was "seriously on the fence."

Opponents included longtime resident Lawrence Schramm. He was the president of the association when the covenant was signed; 35 years later, he still opposes an eatery as being ripe for noise, foul odors, traffic and loitering by teenagers.

Even without a kitchen, "it can only cause problems," Schramm said at the meeting.

Among the supporters of a cafe are Wyndhurst Station merchants like David Stelzer, co-owner of the toy store Shenanigans, and residents like the actress who calls herself Mink Stole and starred in most of John Waters' movies.

"A high percentage of our customers are families with young children," Stelzer told the 25 people who attended the meeting at the Roland Park Library. "They all say, 'I want something to eat.' And they are the neighborhood. I see faces here that I know."

A coffee shop/cafe is just what Wyndhurst needs, said Stole, a Wyndhurst native who moved back about 18 months ago after living in Los Angeles for 30 years.

"I think the neighborhood is sorely lacking that," she said.

On the fence was Eric Thompson, who said he would hate to see the precedent set by the covenant broken after all these years but understands that "it's a new world. Even if we don't change this (at Wyndhurst Station), it will change somewhere."

Caught in the middle is Weinfeld, who told residents that there are negotiations going on to open an eatery in the former Wyndhurst Lodge, which is located in a nearby shopping center that is not bound by any such covenant.

Weinfeld said he considers the planned cafe as an amenity for the community, based on complaints from business owners and customers that there's no place to eat.

Also attending the meeting was a woman who announced that she and her husband are the couple that Weinfeld is negotiating with to run the cafe and coffee shop.

"I'm hoping people will view this as a service and not as a problem," said the woman, who asked that their names not be published, because her husband could lose his job. The couple used to operate a similar type of business on York Road in the 1990s.

No one at the meeting questioned the couple's experience or the sincerity of Weinfeld, 36, who grew up in Homeland and swam at the Roland Park Pool.

"You seem like a fine fellow," said John Murphy, an attorney, of Blythewood.

But he said his community near the Roland Park Pool and Friends School is "not terribly tranquil" to begin with, and that Wyndhurst Station was designed to be "a low-intensity commercial use.

"Just from a selfish standpoint I want to maintain the tranquility of my neighborhood," Murphy said.

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