

Sweetbay's Fresh New Civic Role

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Tampa-based Sweetbay Supermarkets wants to remake the stale image of its former incarnation, Kash n' Karry. This extreme makeover isn't just limited to its produce department. The company is becoming a different kind of corporate citizen.

Recently Sweetbay agreed to take a big risk with its store in the center of the Temple Terrace downtown redevelopment project, which aims to create a city center with lots of public spaces and features designed to slow traffic and protect pedestrians.

The existing Kash n' Karry - which will be converted to a Sweetbay- is a ho-hum grocery store model with an expansive parking lot fronting busy 56th Street. The original design for a new Sweetbay called for a nicer building but the same layout. In the grocery business, easy access and lots of parking mean profits, so stores are hesitant to monkey with the formula.

Sweetbay has a long lease on the property and its executives could have dug in their heels. Instead they have agreed to build a store that will be in the center of the new development and not visible from the street. The plan now matches the New Urbanism vision Temple Terrace's leaders have for their redevelopment. The agreement is a bright spot in a city project that has had its share of problems.

As some will remember, it was Sweetbay that opened the first grocery store in St. Petersburg's Midtown last year, bringing affordable food and jobs to a neighborhood that needed help.

Kash n' Karry was once so low-profile and uninvolved that many Tampa leaders didn't even know it was headquartered here. Sweetbay seems to represent not just a new name, but a new commitment to the community.