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DORCHESTER

## **New Codman Square store presents challenges for America's Food Basket**

**Posted by Cara Bayles**

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By Cara Bayles, Town Correspondent

For the most part, neighbors are glad that America's Food Basket has opened a grocery store in the space occupied by People's Tropical Supermarket in Codman Square. The prior tenants at the Washington Street storefront were notorious for unclean conditions and rude staff, residents say.

America's Food Basket, a local grocery chain with other locations in Hyde Park and on Field's Corner, is planning to renovate the store, making it one floor (and handicapped accessible). Edwin Polanco, the store's general manager, said they'd have the work done at night, so as not to disturb store operations.

Residents agreed the renovations were necessary, but worried about the noise at night, and about the construction work compromising the quality of the food.

"It will take a little time for us to get everything straightened out, but we're working on it," Polanco told residents during a Wednesday night Codman Square Neighborhood Council meeting.

Aside from the location's reputation, Polanco and his co-manager, Gonzalo Diaz, face the challenge of meeting the expectations of neighborhood activists who have longed for healthy alternatives at a local grocery store. The Dorchester enclave is known for its health and environmental activism.

The owners of a new LEED-certified home at 81 Brent St. have invited neighbors to check out its solar water-heating system, and rainwater harvesting installations. A group of young activists known as the BOLD Teens have led community health workshops and several anti-smoking campaigns. Boston Public Health Commissioner Barbara Ferrer has praised the community as particularly active around issues of public health.

That culture was reflected in the community's meeting with the new supermarket's owners. They asked them not to sell tobacco products in the store, and while they praised the store for offering produce like plantains, which reflect the taste and culture of the community, neighbors also raised questions about the food's freshness.

The neighborhood has also developed concerns about the new owners in the weeks since they took over the store. They've been parking delivery trucks at the bus stop for on the corner of Kenwood Street and Washington, and they haven't been disposing their cardboard boxes properly, residents said on Wednesday.

"I'm sad to say, you have some bad habits to change," said Richard Heath, of the Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, who told the owners they needed to use their loading dock, raised concerns about their pricing habits, and encouraged them to hire from the community.

But after the meeting, he shook Polanco's hand and gave him a business card. "We're all glad you're here," he said.

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