



# FINALLY! Olive Garden coming to Vineland

Daniel J. Kov , March 16, 2017



VINELAND - Olive Garden finally appears to be coming to Vineland as part of a project spearheaded by furniture giant Raymour & Flanigan.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority on Thursday approved a redevelopment project proposal designated for the site of the former Kmart on South Delsea Drive.

The roughly \$13 million project calls for the renovation of the Kmart building into a 30,000-square-foot showroom for Raymour & Flanigan and a

50,000-square-foot location for Gabe's, a discount clothing chain headquartered in West Virginia.

"The former Kmart property is a prime location along our main business corridor and we are excited to see it redeveloped," Mayor Anthony Fanucci said. "The project is a perfect complement to the stores and eateries located at the adjacent Cumberland Mall. Working to bring jobs to Vineland is one of my highest priorities as mayor, and this project will be a significant addition to our local economy."

Olive Garden, an Italian casual-dining chain that has topped the wish list of many Cumberland County residents for years, will join unspecified grocery and auto parts stores at the 15-acre site, according to the EDA.

The existing TD Bank and Arby's restaurant will remain on location. The project is expected to create 133 full-time jobs. "This will be a good development for the area," Vineland Economic Development Director Sandy Forosisky said in response to the approval. "The community will be very pleased — this area loves franchises."

According to Forosisky, the city has been trying to attract Olive Garden to the area for many years now. The franchise restaurant had been eyeing that area of Delsea since at least 2010. "That was something everybody always wanted," she said. "Any survey we ever did, it was always the No. 1 requested restaurant."

Local residents were thrilled with the news of an Olive Garden coming when they learned it from The Daily Journal on Thursday. Kayla Jacquet said she and her boyfriend go to the Mays Landing location for their dates. "I think Olive Garden would be great for the community," she said. "I personally love Olive Garden. It's just good food."

Kathleen Cubi, who also frequents the Mays Landing location, said she was delighted to learn she would be able to order her chicken parmesan after a day shopping at the Cumberland Mall. "I know a lot of people are excited," she said.

Forosisky credited Raymour & Flanigan with securing the franchise restaurant as part of their project. The entire redevelopment of that area will be a boon to the city, she said. "I'm excited to have Raymour & Flanigan in the area," Forosisky said. "It brings vitality back to the area; it is terrific, and if we get the Olive Garden on top of it, oh my."

The provisional timeline of the project calls for Raymour to begin acquisition of the properties in May and open its showroom in a year. Olive Garden and Gabe's would follow, with the expectation of a 2018 summer opening, according to the proposal. The grocer and auto parts store may not be open for two years. All construction is expected to be wrapped up by October 2019.

"Everything was predicated on getting this approved," Forosisky said. "I think they want to get started right away."

The EDA approval means the applicant, Raymour & Flanigan Properties LLC, will get roughly \$3 million in eligible state taxes refunded. The application is through the EDA's Economic Redevelopment and Growth Program.

As part of its acquisition, Raymour will need to purchase two lots on the site at 3850 S. Delsea Drive.

One parcel contains the former Kmart store, which closed in October 2015. Three new buildings will be developed on 123,000 square feet at the site and be home to Olive Garden, the auto parts retailer and a grocer.



In the EDA's memorandum discussing the project, officials said they saw the project as a plus for the area.

"The project will generate additional activity on the Delsea Drive commercial corridor," the memorandum states. "It may attract new shoppers who can conveniently access the center via Route 55 ... and may also keep shoppers in Vineland who have otherwise been forced to expend additional time and cost traveling to other areas for particular goods and services. The result is likely to be additional money spent in Vineland, enhancing

economic opportunity for the area."

EDA officials also saw the incoming retailers as no threat to the current businesses in the area. "This project is anticipated to be successful for the participating retailers because of location relative to market demand," the memorandum stated. "The retailers sought for this site do not currently serve the Vineland market and are thus unlikely to cannibalize existing sales by opening in this location."