

## Wal-Mart grocery on Gaines Street?

### City says: Maybe

By Julian Pecquet  
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

City officials have found an unlikely negotiating partner in their efforts to breathe new life into Tallahassee's struggling arts district: Wal-Mart.

The city has started talking with the retail giant about building a grocery store on Gaines Street, said Michael Parker, the city's director of economic development. This wouldn't be your sprawling suburban superstore: the proposed Neighborhood Market would be 40,000 square feet - considerably smaller than the 101,000-square-foot SuperCenter that was recently approved for North Monroe Street.

That doesn't mean it's going down well with area patrons and business owners. The idea has some people concerned, in part because one of the proposed sites for the Neighborhood Market had been identified as a place for performing artists to live, exhibit and rehearse their crafts.

"It is not in keeping with what everybody in Tallahassee's vision is for what Gaines Street should be," said Ruth Wharton, the chairwoman of the Gaines Street Vitalization Committee.

Neighborhood Markets have been around since 1998 and offer groceries and drugs, general merchandise such as beauty products, photo services and stationery.

"Just like Publix, they have grocery stores that fit different markets," Parker said. "They believe there's a market for this product in this area."

The city has bought several properties along the Gaines Street corridor with the hopes of revitalizing the area into an 18-hour downtown with homes, stores and entertainment.