

[back to article](#)



Friedman Bros. sets sights on Lowe's proposed site

By [PAUL PAYNE](#)
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Monday, May 4, 2009 at 3:01 p.m.

A big-box hardware store is planning a return to its Petaluma roots.

Friedman's Home Improvement wants to open a store in Petaluma and is evaluating about a half-dozen locations in the city where it was founded in 1946, a senior executive said Monday.

Among the possible choices is the proposed Deer Creek Village on North McDowell Boulevard, where developer Merlone Geier Partners of San Francisco had been planning a shopping center anchored by Lowe's.

David Proctor, Friedman's chief operating officer, said his company is in talks with the developers about taking the spot instead. Proctor said there are also negotiations about opening in the proposed Regency Centers shopping mall on East Washington Street, where a Target store is planned.

"Opening in Petaluma is our top priority," Proctor said. "It's an under-served market and the people need our products. It's a logical expansion."

Greg Geertsen, a Merlone Geier spokesman, confirmed his company has been in "early conversations" with Friedman's but is still considering Lowe's as a potential anchor. The developer is expected to make a choice within 60 days, he said.

"Ultimately, it will be our decision," Geertsen said. "They are both good operations. It comes down to who wants to go there the most."

Lowe's officials did not immediately comment on whether they are continuing to pursue the location.

Big-box home improvement stores have been in short supply in Petaluma since last month's closing of Home Depot, which acquired Santa Rosa-based Yardbirds in 2005.

Petalumans have an Orchard Supply Store and smaller hardware stores, but studies indicate they are driving to other cities for construction materials.

Friedman's tried to fill the void earlier this year.

It proposed an 80,000-square-foot store within the planned Riverfront development on the site of the city's old waste water treatment plant on Hopper Street. But the deal fell through in March because of timing issues involving the decommissioning of the sewer plant.

Now, Friedman's is considering other locations. It will seek the public's opinion in a telephone poll to be conducted by an Indiana firm in the coming weeks, Proctor said.

"First and foremost in making the selection will be where the people want us," Proctor said.

The Deer Creek and Regency Center projects are in planning stages. Both have completed city mandated fiscal analyses and are finishing other studies before they will go for City Council approval.

Geertsen said he hopes his company will break ground within a year on the 315,000-square-foot shopping center that will feature smaller shops and a restaurant.

Friedman's opened its first store in Petaluma 63 years ago. The company, which had a store on Washington Street near downtown, pulled up stakes in 1976 and never came back. Today, it has stores in Santa Rosa, Sonoma and Ukiah.

You can reach Staff Writer Paul Payne at 762-7297 or [paul.payne@](mailto:paul.payne@pressdemocrat.com)

pressdemocrat.com.
