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# DAILY NEWS

## **Bronx Neighborhood Leaders, Merchants Oppose New Liquor Stores on Southern Blvd. in Crotona Park East**



*Kerry McLean, Director of Community Development with WHEDco, and Jebel Ceesay, President of the Southern Boulevard Merchant Association and owner of JB Collection Clothing at 1085 Southern Blvd. in the Bronx, oppose the opening of two new liquor stores on Southern Blvd.*

*Photo by Viorel Florescu (Daily News).*

Neighborhood leaders and merchants are fighting to scotch plans for two new liquor stores on Southern Blvd. near Freeman St.

Freeman St. Liquors and Judy Wine & Liquors have requested liquor licenses to open at 1228 Southern Blvd. and 1302 Southern Blvd. in Crotona Park East.

But spirited opponents claim the growing Bronx neighborhood needs clothing, furniture and electronics stores, restaurants and community centers - not booze. Crotona Park East has struggled with poverty and crime.

"We have too many liquor stores in the neighborhood already," said barbershop owner Ricardo Junco. "Unsavory elements hang out in front of liquor stores. You get panhandling. We need a change. I don't see how it benefits the community."

Organized opposition to a liquor store is highly unusual, said a State Liquor Authority spokesman.

The SLA will vote Wednesday to deny or approve a license for Freeman St. Liquors. It will review Judy Wine & Liquors as soon as Feb 29.

The Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp., Community Board 3 and state Assemblyman Marcos Crespo have urged the SLA to turn down the applicants. The Southern Blvd. Merchants Association has collected more than 40 signatures on a petition.

The population of Crotona Park East grew 10% between 2000 and 2010 but the neighborhood lacks shopping and food options, said Kerry McLean, WHEDco community development director. WHEDco operates Intervale Green, a nearby affordable housing development and helped found the merchants association.

"We need more variety," noted Jebel Ceesay, owner of JB Collection Clothing and president of the merchants association.

Freeman St. Liquors has installed a shiny--though misspelled--sign at its location and Robert Dehuitzil, manager at Luke's Pizza next door, said the new store could boost business at his restaurant.

But local resident Michael Aughburns, 55, said, "How about a library? How about a cultural center?"

State law prohibits new liquor stores within 200 feet of schools and houses of worship. Many such buildings dot the surrounding blocks, McLean said.

Down the street from Freeman St. Liquors, Housing Options and Geriatric Association Resources serves mentally ill and formerly homeless adults, including many with substance abuse problems.

"For a liquor store to open would not be helpful," said Noris Colon, president of Housing Options.