

Protesters shut down meeting over African market in Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood

Mayor Jacob Frey and Council Member Abdi Warsame left shortly after arriving.

By Miguel Otárola (<http://www.startribune.com/miguel-otarola/396828811/>) Star Tribune |

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A meeting to gather feedback about a proposed African market in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis ended abruptly Friday evening when protesters took over the microphone and chanted to stop the project.

The chaotic scene unfolded inside the gym of the Brian Coyle Community Center, with a large group of demonstrators opposed to the public market hoisting signs and demanding to end the meeting. Mayor Jacob Frey and Council Member Abdi Warsame, who represents the neighborhood and envisioned the market years ago, were surrounded by the protesters and exited the center shortly after arriving.

In June, Warsame and Frey announced that the “Africa Village” concept would be built on a city-owned parking lot near the intersection of S. 4th Street and Cedar Avenue. The mall would house small businesses and would include housing, offices, a clinic and youth programming, according to city planners.



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Some video of Warsame trying to calm things down earlier. Opponents of the mall chanting to shut the meeting down now.



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Opponents of the proposed market chanted “We are not for sale” and “people over profits” on Friday night.

Warsame previously said the mall had the support of “98% of the Somali community in the state of the Minnesota.” However, business owners and an organized group of mothers in the neighborhood have spoken out against the project, saying it would diminish business and would not address issues of crime in the area.

Those voices shouted over each other at Friday’s meeting, which had been organized by the city. The protesters entered the gym in front of Warsame, holding signs that read “NO VOICE, NO MALL.”

They surrounded Warsame once he spoke on the microphone. After an attempt to address the crowd failed, Warsame told attendees to stand to his left if they supported the mall and to the right if they didn't.

Frey soon entered the gym and stood by Warsame. He stayed for a few minutes before being escorted out of the center. "This is the nature of the process. You involve a community, you hear different perspectives and then you figure out the best pathway forward," he told reporters outside the center.

When asked about people's feelings that they haven't been consulted about the mall, he responded: "We haven't even submitted the [request for proposals] yet."

Inside the gym, Warsame continued trying to calm the crowd and later left the room. Protesters yelled into a microphone: "He is selling our community from under us" and "We are not for sale!"

Later, outside the center, Warsame said he was "disappointed" by people at the meeting who were "trying to hijack the narrative."

"This area is going to get built regardless," he said. "Either it's intentionally built with us, or it's built with other people in mind. That's the one thing I'm afraid of."

Before the meeting began, Sadio Ismail, a business owner in south Minneapolis, said people who criticize the project should share their concerns with city officials.

"People are afraid of the unknown, because they don't know what the mall is going to bring. I think there's a fear," she said. "You cannot just reject something because of the unknown."

The public market is expected to break ground in spring 2021 and open in 2022, according to city documents.

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