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NEWS

## FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FERDINAND: MUCH MORE THAN A COFFEE WAR

Posted on April 23, 2014 by CHRIS FARAONE Email



It's a Friday afternoon at Haley House Bakery Cafe in Roxbury, and the place is hopping. The scene screams community; at a table close to the counter, a well-known local hip-hop activist and his partner enjoy a veggie combo plate with their newborn son. Across the room, beneath a striking swath of close-up pics portraying bakery employees, vocal gaggles of local workers, residents, and younger college students sip carefully from hot cups. In between random work chat, more than a few mention the significant construction underway in nearby Dudley Square—their hopes for the area, perceived setbacks, the works.

As the Ferdinand Building undergoes a \$120 million rehabilitation, the long-dormant architectural cornerstone of Dudley has finally become a hot topic—not only in Roxbury, but in the larger media and city as well. Stunning as the makeover is—in addition to a facelift of the original 19th Century Renaissance Revival facade, builders are erecting a stunningly ornate and swirling brick annex on the back sides—not everyone is snapping on a party hat just yet. So I'm not surprised when, before their food is even ready, someone sharing my communal table raises the question (which I'll paraphrase for the sake of brevity): "Isn't Haley House trying to get a space in that building? I hear Starbucks is trying to move in there or something."

As luck would have it, about an hour earlier I'd met Discover Roxbury Executive Director Derek Lumpkins to ask him the same question. The issue has surfaced in the news over the past few weeks, as the Boston Redevelopment Authority processes 22 applications for storefronts in the Ferdinand. But much of that reporting—as well as the ensuing public dialogue on social media—has been misguided, and so I went straight to Lumpkins, whose organization acts as a de facto Roxbury welcome wagon (and which applied for retail space itself). Asked how he feels about *Boston Globe* business columnist Shirley Leung [recommending the BRA selection committee "Say yes to Starbucks before it changes its mind,"](#) Lumpkins explained: "There's a lot more to this than Starbucks versus Haley House."

*Globe* news and op-ed writers—as well as smaller blogs and outlets—acknowledged some applicants besides behemoths such as Burger King and Starbucks, including the local likes of Tasty Burger, Bon Me, and Parish Cafe. Discover Roxbury, however, has been largely ignored—that despite their sensible pitch to play the role of everything from interactive art space to neighborhood tour hub and information center, all of which they already have a strong record of doing. Lumpkins says the BRA has been oddly unresponsive since a late-March open house in which applicants presented their proposals. Reached for comment, a city spokesperson says the search committee "recommended six finalists to the Commissioner of Property and Construction Management," and that the city and BRA staff are "currently interviewing the recommended retail entities." Throughout the process, the spokesperson says national and local retailers were treated equally.

As for the much ballyhooed coffee wars ... while Haley House would serve java at a new Dudley outpost, the focus of their Ferdinand venture would additionally include a prototype pizza shop that could be spun into a chain. There are, however, three other applicants also hoping to brew there besides Starbucks, one of which is an Ethiopian bean importer that most roast aficionados would drool over. According to BRA documents, they are: "Etno Café Gourmet Coffee," "Chowdhury, Begum; Dudley Coffee & Convenience," "Coffee Shop with a Purpose." Since the independence and in certain cases local roots of those and other applicants have been marginalized by some willing to give Starbucks the key to the city, I found it only fitting to give Lumpkins the final say for now ...

"Yes, not opposed to chain being in there," says Lumpkins, who agrees that it's unfair for a

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