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By JENNIFER DENEVAN News West | [0 comments](#)

## Bashas' Grocery in Needles to close May 9

NEEDLES — Word has spread quickly about Bashas' Grocery closing May 9, which means the loss of more than 40 jobs and leaves city officials looking for a new store.

Rick Daniels, city manager, said finding a replacement is a top priority for the city at this time. There are a lot of soon-to-be-unemployed residents to think about along with needing to be able to provide fresh food to everyone, he added.

There is also the fact that a grocer in town has implications on the tourism aspect, he said. Every summer visitors come out, stop at Bashas', purchase various food products and other needed items and then head to the Colorado River. A grocer in town is very much needed for that aspect as well, he continued.

Daniels said it wasn't shocking news to hear the grocery store was closing its doors. The city hoped for the best but has been preparing for the worst, he continued.

Knowing the store's lease with Reliable Properties was up in at the end of June and an agreement with the city for subsidies would also conclude in June, the city assumed it likely they would close, he said. He, staff and now the new economic development consultant have been working on addressing the issue of needing a grocery store in town since the first of the year, he continued.

The store nearly closed four years ago, citing bankruptcy and rising rental costs. The city intervened to ensure residents and visitors had a store to buy fresh food and other items.

A three-way deal was worked out between the city, Bashas' and Reliable Properties to keep the store opened. The city subsidized the store by paying \$150,000 for the first two years and \$200,000 for the last two, with this being the final year.

City Councilman Tom Darcy asked Daniels during the March 25 meeting if the city would pay the final \$50,000 or not given the store is closing before the end of the contract.

Daniels said no.

The city has been talking with Reliable Properties about the issue as well, Daniels reported. Both parties have been exploring options since the start of year. The city has also had the hired economic development consultant, Michael Bracken, involved in the process.

Daniels said Bracken will be attending a networking event in Los Angeles called Retail Live! The event is an opportunity to connect with various retailers and see if those businesses would be a good fit for a city, he continued. It may be a chance to connect with a grocer.

Bracken will also be attending the International Conference of Shopping Centers April 2, Daniels said. Again, the conference is a chance to connect with potential grocers.

Daniels said the conference is really a large trade show and it serves as an introduction between communities and retailers of all types including food places like Subway and all-purpose stores like Wal-Mart.

In preparation of both events, the city has been working to prepare logistical information those retailers are going to be looking for, Daniels said. Retailers need to know about population, traffic through town and other demographics of the city and that information has been prepared and is ready to go, he continued.

While the city has been working on this issue, so has Reliable Properties, Daniels said. The shopping center owner also has a vested interest given they'll have a space opening up that they need filled, he added.

Reliable Properties has many shopping centers throughout southern California, Daniels said. They are using their own contacts to work to see who would be interested in coming to Needles, he continued.

Daniels said he doesn't think there'll be a replacement by May 9. He does feel good about the work the city has already put into the process and knowing that Reliable Properties is also working on solving the problem.

City staff and Reliable Properties are talking to all national grocery store chains, Daniels said. They are looking at all options.

He said finding a replacement is an urgent matter. The prosperity of a community depends on having basic services such as a grocer with fresh food. "It's a critical element to the fabric of a community," he concluded.

