

Opponents halt INS move to Midtown

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Body

For the third time in a year, plans to build a headquarters for the Immigration and Naturalization Service have fallen through.

The federal government planned to build a five-story INS office at 10th and West Peachtree streets in Midtown, but that proposal has died. The Midtown Alliance, a group of leaders from businesses, churches and civic groups, said it would prefer an office or residential tower and stores to a building for immigration services.
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Will Herbig of the alliance said in April that an INS center could have "a positive impact" on Midtown, but Alliance President Susan Mendheim said Friday the group heard from residents of nearby apartments and houses who were opposed to the plan. She said the proposal was inconsistent with a community land-use plan but that she might not oppose putting the center elsewhere in Midtown.

She said the "main use" of the building would involve suspected illegal immigrants fighting government efforts to deport them, which probably would not generate much business for local merchants.

"If you're going to a facility to fight deportation," she said, "you're not going to do any shopping."

About 500 to 800 people a day visit the INS, housed now in an aging building on Forsyth Street in downtown Atlanta. They participate in citizenship interviews and ceremonies, get information about immigration and deal with issues such as political asylum, visas and work permits with about 120 government employees. Suspected illegal immigrants also face immigration judges in the building.

Fred Alexander, deputy district director, said the agency must move because the government plans an extensive renovation of the building. The General Services Administration, which manages real estate for federal agencies, is looking for land to build an office with about 100,000 square feet. "There are no potential sites in mind," he said.

A year ago, plans for a building on 2.3 acres occupied by the Atlanta Civic Center parking lot crumbled after opposition from neighbors, business people and city officials.

The government also considered building near the Garnett MARTA station but said the property did not meet their needs.

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