

Should Alton have a Starbucks? Nearly 1,300 petition signers think so

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
August 14 2018 3:02 PM



ALTON – A petition to place a Starbucks within the Alton Square Mall is making its rounds on social media.

Started by Dustyn Alexander on change.org, a site hosting various petitions for a variety of things, it has now garnered 1,293 signatures over the course of the last five days. It should be noted, however, this petition, while aimed at both Starbucks and the Alton Square Mall's owners, The Hull Group, is not sponsored by either organization at this time. In fact, it is the complete machination of Alexander, who said he was inspired to create it while dining with a friend at Olga's in the mall.

“I created the petition about a week ago while my friend and I went there for lunch,” he said in a Facebook message. “We went to the Olga's and, while walking around, we talked about how popular the mall used to be when we were younger. We talked about how the mall's been slowly dying, losing businesses every year, as more and more

outlets close. I then came up with the idea that we should start a petition for a popular store to open in the mall bring back business. I notice from co-workers and friends that they all wish there was a Starbucks closer to home, so I decided on that, but I stated in my petition, that other businesses would be good too.”

Alexander's assessment of the mall has been disputed by Alton Mayor Brant Walker in previous interviews with Riverbender.com. Moves made with the Georgia-based Hull group, such as the purchase and demolition of the Macy's building in order to make more retail space facing Homer Adams Parkway and the April 2017 release of mall plans, which include a possible movie theater, were showcased by the mayor as signs the Alton Square Mall is on a steady rebound.

Another sign the mall is on the rebound is J.C. Penny's revamping its salon space earlier this month. That store's field manager said the store is their number two in the region of 15 stores – only being beaten by the South St. Louis County location.

When it comes to Starbucks locations, however, Alexander's assessment is irrefutable. The nearest locations to Alton are in Edwardsville with two being in the city proper, and the other being within the campus of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), where Alexander is a student.

“I am a fan of Starbucks,” he said. “I am a student at SIUE, so I visit the Starbucks inside almost everyday. There are usually lines out the door every morning, but it's worth the wait.”

While Alton does not have a Starbucks, it does contain at least three local coffee shops – Germania Brew Haus, Maevas and Post Commons, as well as several other places to get coffee, such as Mr. Donut. Some people associated with those local brew houses have taken to social media against Alexander's petition. Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany said she is also against a Starbucks coming to Alton, instead encouraging traffic to local shops.

“I would encourage those who are organizing a crusade to bring corporate coffee to our area to visit all of the incredible independently owned coffee shops in town,” she said. “Just a few years ago, you could not get a decent cup locally, but now we have an abundance of options for places to get caffeinated, most of which are unique atmospheres in beautifully-restored historic buildings. We should all embrace Alton's own burgeoning coffee culture and support those stores that are investing in our area in so many ways, rather than rally to attract a competitor.”

Alexander said he also enjoyed Alton's local coffee shops, but said Starbucks could still have a place in the city without putting them under.

“I realize that the local shops might be intimidated by a Starbucks location so close, but I believe that those who really support the shops would continue to go to them and support them,” he said. “I myself enjoy the downtown coffee shops, but those are downtown and not in the mall. I don't think a Starbucks would put them out of business. It would, in fact, bring more business to Alton as a whole, hopefully encouraging more growth in popularity and employment opportunities.”

He added he would “definitely visit the mall more often if there were more things to do there.”

A petition signer who identified themselves as Andrew Isiminger said: “As a mall employee, I believe a Starbucks would bring more business and help revamp the mall.”

That petition can be found here: <https://www.change.org/p/starbucks-put-a-starbucks-in-alton-square-mall>.

Requests for comment sent to Mayor Walker, Starbucks media contacts and the management team at Germania Brew Haus have not been returned at this time.

Again, this petition is in no way sponsored by Starbucks or the Alton Square Mall, and it is not known if either entity would make moves toward its goal, regardless of the number of signatures.