

Jamaica Plain

home news events discussions search

< Back to front page

Text size - +

JAMAICA PLAIN

Senator asks Whole Foods to accept her proposals or don't open in JP

Posted by Matt Rocheleau April 30, 2011 05:41 PM

E-mail | Print | Comments ()

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A State Senator is asking Whole Foods to break its lease agreement or sublet its Jamaica Plain property before the grocer opens a planned new store there if the company does not agree to two requests she has.

Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz said the national supermarket company should establish a fund to preserve the affordability of property around the store and she demanded that the grocer commit to hiring local residents for a “specific percentage” of positions at the supermarket.

“If making commitments of this size is beyond Whole Foods’ reach, the simplest way to protect the neighborhood would be for Whole Foods to break their lease on the Hyde Square space, or sublet it to another grocer specializing in Latino foods,” Chang-Díaz wrote in a [letter](#) Thursday to the [Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council](#).

The company signed a 20-year lease for the space at 415 Centre Street with Newton-based property owner Knapp Foods, Inc. [in mid-January](#) and has since begun renovating the building. No opening date has been set for the store. [Knapp Foods](#) had owned and operated Latino-specialty supermarket Hi-Lo Foods there for 47 years before that store’s closure and Whole Foods’ lease signing were abruptly announced.

In early March, the neighborhood council passed, by a one-vote margin, [a measure to publicly oppose](#) the store’s intentions to open a chain in Hyde Square. While taking that stance, the council concurrently [formed an ad-hoc committee](#) to gather additional information, questions and concerns about, and possible alternative uses for the property.

The Senator’s letter was her first public comment about the grocery chain’s plans for JP that have sparked [intense and ongoing debate](#), in the neighborhood and beyond, including the formation of [grassroots groups](#) both [for](#) and [against](#) the grocer’s arrival. The message from the legislator, who both represents and resides in Jamaica Plain, was addressed specifically to the ad-hoc group comprised of [five JPNC members and 10 additional community members](#).

“As many residents expressed, there are several positives to bringing a retailer such as Whole Foods to JP,” wrote Chang-Díaz, before later adding,

Connect to Your Town Jamaica Plain on Facebook



You like **Your Town Jamaica Plain**. · Admin Page · Insights · **Error**

ADVERTISEMENT

JAMAICA PLAIN REAL ESTATE »

142

Homes for sale

40

Rentals available

27

Open houses this week

1

New listings this week

SPECIAL ADVERTISING DIRECTORY

CAMP GUIDE »



A camp for every kid!

Adventure, sports, theater, music, arts or technology—find the perfect camp for your child at boston.com/campguide.

ADVERTISEMENT

“Unfortunately, there are also serious negative impacts that Whole Foods’ entry into the neighborhood is likely to bring. I believe, with a heavy heart, that these disadvantages outweigh the advantages.”

“Even if Whole Foods behaves as the best corporate citizen, the best neighbor possible by all of our usual standards, its presence will still light a fire under the gentrification process that will displace low- and moderate- income residents from JP,” she continued “Increasing property values in our community is not always bad. Indeed, this is something every home owner in JP—low- or high-income, white, brown, or black—probably hopes for. But pace matters. A lot.”

She laid out two requests for Whole Foods in addition to [pledges the company has made](#) on its own to the community.

The company has said it expects to employ around 100 at their JP location. To that, the Senator said: “Whole Foods needs to commit to hiring locally for a specific percentage of these jobs.”

Chang-Díaz also said the company “should also work with credible community groups in the Hyde/Jackson area to set up and endow a community preservation fund for the purpose of keeping Hyde/Jackson area properties affordable for current residents.”

According to its website, Whole Foods donates one-day sales three times each year to a local or regional non-profit or educational organization. The Senator said the company should replace that strategy by front-loading its charitable efforts toward the fund supporting affordable properties.

“Endowing a fund that could buy available property in the Hyde/Jackson area with a commitment to keeping it affordable will require a serious financial commitment—no doubt,” she wrote. “But Whole Foods’ detrimental impact on the neighborhood in the absence of such an investment would be of a far greater magnitude.”

“The planned expansion of a Whole Foods Market into the Hyde Square section of Jamaica Plain has generated heated debate among my constituents,” Chang- Díaz’s letter said. “Since I first learned of Hi-Lo Foods’ closing, my office has done its best to understand from all sides the different perspectives on this highly divisive issue”

She wrote that she and her staff have attended several community meetings on the matter, read hundreds of residents’ e-mails and met with Whole Foods officials, [former Hi-Lo employees](#) and local organizations.

Whole Foods officials could not immediately be reached for comment Saturday. The Senator and her staff were not immediately for follow-up questions regarding the letter that was first reported on by the [Jamaica Plain Gazette](#).

To see the full text of the Senator's letter, [click here](#).

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.



You like Senator asks Whole Foods

[◀ Previous entry](#)

[Next entry ▶](#)

Jamaica Plain Headlines »

- District 6 Councilor Matt O'Malley announces June office hours (3 days ago)
- Religious order's leader replaced after suing Boston cardinal (3 days ago)
- Boston Archdiocese, nuns order settle suit over pension funds (4 days ago)
- Some once-foes in JP's Whole Foods debate now working together (5 days ago)

Also From Jamaica Plain

HI-LO TO WHOLE FOODS



[Recent changes in JP](#)

AFTERMATH



[Pizzeria sees continued support](#)

JAMAICA PLAIN HISTORY



[Inn, founded by brewers, quenched local thirst](#)

NIGHTLIFE



[A night out in Jamaica Plain](#)



Local advertising by PaperG



[Jamaica Plain On Twitter »](#)

MORE FROM BOSTON.COM

Possible poisoning victim ID'd as Somerville comics store owner
(Your Town)

Woman seriously injured by rolling vehicle on Beacon Hill
(Your Town)

Chaos ensues after empty car hits woman
(Local News)

Girl's virginity put up for sale, police say
(National news)

Another trooper injured in crash
(Local News)

Sparks flying
(Lifestyle)

MORE FROM THE WEB

What's Your Virtual Weight Index?
(The Digital Diet)

5 Signs a Caregiver Is Stealing From You
(Caring.com)

Best Buy Employee Loses Job After Thwarting Shoplifter
(AOL Jobs)

'Secret Shark' Discovered Hiding Out at English Aquarium
(FoxNews.com)

Doctor-Recommended Back Pain Remedies
(Lifescript.com)

5 Types Of Women Men Avoid
(iVillage)

[Sponsored links]



READER COMMENTS »

[View reader comments \(\) »](#) [Comment on this story »](#)

District 6 Councilor Matt O'Malley announces June office hours <http://bo.st/mzP8Xz> 2 days ago

Free parking! Memorial Day 5/30: Municipal buildings closed including City Hall, schools. Parking meters FREE. @BostonUpdate @notifyboston 2 days ago

Some once-foes in JP's Whole Foods debate now working together. Have your thoughts/approach to the issue changed? - <http://bo.st/mJleJU> 3 days ago

The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston and the Daughters of St. Paul of JP settled a dispute over pension plans. -

[Follow other Boston.com Tweets](#) | [What is Twitter?](#)

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Events](#) | [Schools](#) | [Sports](#) | [Discussions](#) | [Marketplace](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [Contact Boston.com](#) | [Contact The Boston Globe](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | © 2011 NY Times Co.