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JAMAICA PLAIN

## Neighborhood group recommends community benefits from Whole Foods

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 29, 2011 11:13 AM

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*This story was updated Friday, July 1 at 8 p.m. to include Whole Foods' comment concerning the JPNC ad hoc committee's report:*

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A Jamaica Plain group studying the planned Whole Foods grocery store is recommending that the company create a fund to support affordable housing, among other steps aimed at helping the store's workers and surrounding neighbors.

The ad hoc group formally submitted the [69-page document](#) to the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council Tuesday night. The council did not officially weigh in on the report or its findings, but voted to reconvene at a special meeting July 12 – time and locale to be determined – to discuss next steps about how the council will use the report.

Whole Foods plans to open in Hyde Square in late fall in the space formerly occupied by the Hi-Lo grocery.

Among other recommendations for a community-benefits agreement with Whole Foods: creating a fund for local organizations to use for foreclosure prevention, tenants' rights counseling, and creating and preserving affordable housing; providing bonuses for employees who are first-time homebuyers in JP or nearby neighborhoods; and allocating funds for to train youths on financial literacy.

The report also asks Whole Foods to commit to hiring a staff made up of 75 percent JP residents at this location over the first five years the store is in operation; and commit to hiring all former Hi-Lo workers interested in working at Whole Foods at positions equivalent to or higher than their former positions.

Other recommendations include that the company commit to the “broadest acceptance” of food programs and coupons; expand a salad bar program to more JP schools; fund a program to assist low- and moderate-income residents in buying healthy foods at locally-owned food sellers; and create a workforce development/small business fund for training programs that target low- and moderate-income residents.

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(To read the entire report, [click here.](#))

Aside from recommendations to Whole Foods, the report also makes recommendations to the community, the council, and elected officials, and Whole Foods.

The report and its recommendations are split into six “broad” categories: “affordable healthy and culturally-appropriate food; gentrification; local and livable employment; small businesses; traffic and parking; and alternative uses of 415 Centre Street.”

“It was a difficult process,” the sub-committee’s chair Steve Laferriere said of creating the report during Tuesday’s council meeting. “I don’t think there’s a single person that agrees with every word in that document. Nor is there a single word in that document that everyone agrees with.”

Both Laferriere and the council’s chair, Andrea Howley, expressed sincere thanks for the volunteer efforts made to compile the report that spanned nine meetings and countless hours of research, debate, writing and editing over a three-month period.

In early March, after passing by a one vote margin a [measure to publicly oppose](#) Whole Foods’ plans to open a store in Hyde Square, the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council [formed the ad-hoc committee](#) to further explore the future of the supermarket space at 415 Centre St.

Whole Foods said after a [chaotic community meeting](#) in early June that the company looks forward to seeing the sub-committee’s report and plans to meet with the council soon. Company officials were not immediately available Wednesday morning to comment on the report, the recommendations or a possible future meeting with the council.

On Friday, Whole Foods spokeswoman Heather McCready said via e-mail: “Whole Foods Market has not received the Ad Hoc Committee’s report yet. When we do, we will be happy to discuss it with them. Our goal is to serve Jamaica Plain as responsible community partners.”

Council members said at Tuesday’s meeting no date has been arranged yet for the council to meet with Whole Foods.

The 20-member JPNC is designed to represent residents on public issues, including development. The public stance the council took earlier this spring has no direct impact on Whole Foods’ plans. But it has been a symbol of opposition and also an indicator of future hurdles Whole Foods may face if the company winds up needing additional city licensing or other approval to open.

The council, a volunteer advisory group, would take a separate vote on such matters and pass a majority recommendation to city officials who make the final call to approve or deny requests.

The [15-person](#) ad-hoc committee meanwhile is a mix of five of the JPNC’s current elected membership and 10 neighborhood residents who are not on the elected council but were selected specifically for the ad-hoc group. Three

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of the 10 resident [members of the ad-hoc group resigned](#) during the process of creating the report.

“The debate around Whole Foods replacing Hi-Lo has so far been contentious, emotional and divisive,” the report concludes. “Too often neighbors who share a desire to see their community thrive have found themselves pitted against one another as they debate the potential impacts of Whole Foods in Hyde Square.”

“This report is an attempt to move beyond the divisive debate and begin a new conversation. Such a conversation must recognize that our community is changing, and Whole Foods’ desire to open a store here is a reflection of that change,” the conclusion continues. “With or without Whole Foods, our neighborhood will continue to evolve. Many of the issues raised by the Whole Foods debate are issues that have been boiling beneath the surface for several years. As Whole Foods has drawn considerable attention to these underlying issues, we have a unique opportunity to discuss them as a community of neighbors, and begin working toward solutions.”

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Below is an edited, condensed list of the report’s recommendations. To read the entire report, [click here](#).

### **Recommendations for the JPNC and the Community**

#### Affordable, Healthy and Culturally-Appropriate Food

- Recognizing Whole Foods may increase the community’s access to healthy food.
- The council should continue its “strong support” bringing a grocery store to Forest Hills
- Partner with a public health organization to help evaluate healthy, affordable, and sustainable food needs in the neighborhood
- Identify other healthy food opportunities
- Identify ways the council can promote healthy eating and strong local food economies

#### Gentrification

- Continue to support the creation of new affordable housing
- Establish the goal of developing more affordable housing in the next ten years than the previous ten (190 units)
- Prioritize the creation of affordable rental housing.
- Hold residential developers accountable to the affordable housing policies of the council – “Inclusionary Zoning, Transit-Oriented Development and Healthy Housing Guidelines”
- Work to reduce condominium conversions by considering promotion of a tax or fee levied on those who convert apartments to condominiums
- Make a priority to preserve all existing affordable housing units

#### Local and Livable Employment

- Support and, if necessary, provide training opportunities to former Hi-Lo employees
- Continue supporting organized labor and every employees’ rights
- Work with other community groups to partner with Whole Foods on recruitment and hiring as well as post-hiring support

#### Small Businesses

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- Monitor the effect of Whole Foods on the surrounding business district for at least five years,
- Support locally-owned small businesses
- Support local nonprofits that support local businesses
- Support events that promote local businesses
- If Whole Foods applies for a common victualler license or zoning relief to provide takeout, consider the impact these licenses and variances may have on local restaurants.
- The council should establish guidelines to inform its commercial licensing and zoning decisions

### **Recommendations for a Community Benefits Agreement with Whole Foods**

#### Affordable, Healthy and Culturally-Appropriate Food

- Commit to the broadest acceptance of food programs and coupons
- Provide non-branded education about the benefits of eating fresh produce, related nutritional information, and healthy cooking
- Provide a salad bar to the Curley School (as planned) and expand this program to other JP schools.

#### Gentrification

- Create a fund to be used by credible local organizations for anti-displacement work, foreclosure prevention, tenants' rights counseling, and the creation and preservation of affordable housing.
- Provide bonuses for first-time homebuyer employees who purchase homes in JP or immediately-abutting neighborhoods.
- Allocate funds for financial literacy youth training and development

#### Local and Livable Employment

- Commit to hiring, across all staffing levels, 75 percent JP residents at this location over the first five years the store is in operation.
- Commit to hiring all former Hi-Lo workers interested in working at Whole Foods at positions equivalent to or higher than their former positions at Hi-Lo. Provide appropriate training to help workers advance
- Partner with local organizations on recruitment and hiring as well as post-hiring support
- Employee demographics at all staffing levels should reflect the racial, ethnic and linguistic demographics of the Hyde/Jackson Square Neighborhood, based on the 2010 Census.
- Offer a living wage, as defined by the City of Boston, and a competitive benefits package for full-time workers.
- Develop training and employment opportunities for local youths

#### Small Businesses

- Fund a program to assist low- and moderate-income residents in buying healthy foods at locally-owned, retail food sellers and farmers' markets
- Share parking with neighboring business tenants after hours.
- Create a workforce development/small business fund for training programs that target low- and moderate-income residents.
- Prioritize purchasing products made by small food manufacturers and other local businesses

#### Traffic and Parking

Provide the traffic study requested by the City of Boston, which should include: traffic flow; peak hour traffic management; parking impact on surrounding community; environmental impact/air quality; deliveries

- Commit to addressing any issues raised by the traffic study prior to opening
- Commit to a community meeting to discuss traffic and parking one year after opening
- Develop programs and incentives to encourage use of alternative transportation means and delivery, including providing bicycle parking, serving as a Hubway kiosk, and offering grocery delivery by bike

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To read the entire report, [click here](#).

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