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JAMAICA PLAIN

## Whole Foods meets with Jamaica Plain group to discuss "good neighbor" pact

Posted by Matt Rocheleau September 7, 2011 05:00 PM

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*This story was updated Thurs., Sept. 8, to include the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council's statement and to correct the list of council members who met with Whole Foods Wednesday:*

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A Jamaica Plain neighborhood group met with officials from Whole Foods Market this morning to discuss the grocer's plans to move to the neighborhood and to present the group's "good neighbor" agreement.

After the meeting, representatives from the supermarket chain said the neighborhood council did not ask officials from Whole Foods Market to sign a deal, but simply discussed a list of requests and topics.

Though the idea of asking Whole Foods to sign a community benefits, or "good neighbor" agreement has been talked about frequently at recent Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council meetings, including [at a meeting last week](#), no such request was made of the company Wednesday and there are no further plans for the company and representatives of the council to meet again, according to a spokeswoman for the retailer.

"We reviewed each of the points ... A large number of the items in the agreement are things Whole Foods Market already does," said spokeswoman Heather McCready, one of five Whole Foods officials who sat down with the council's [recently-formed, five-member negotiating committee](#). "We weren't asked to sign anything ... The meeting was really more of a discussion."

Members of the council's negotiating team were not immediately available to comment Wednesday afternoon. On Thursday, [the committee said in a statement](#) it was told by Whole Foods representatives that the company is "unwilling to enter into any formal agreement at this time."

What the council's committee presented to Whole Foods were "not necessarily specific requests, more topics for discussion," she added by phone Wednesday afternoon.

"It allowed us to talk a lot more extensively and in-depth," about the community outreach Whole Foods stores already do, she said. "I hope they walked away from our meeting today feeling they have a much better understanding of what we offer."

McCready added that Whole Foods officials explained to the committee how the company is "eager to open its doors" at the planned Jamaica Plain store

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because that is when many of its offerings and benefits to the surrounding community will be realized.

The spokeswoman added that what was presented to the company today was “significantly shorter” with “substantially less requests” than [a 69-page report](#), which included a lengthy list of recommendations, an ad hoc committee of the council released earlier this summer.

And, of what the negotiating team presented to the company today, “definitely a large percentage of the items are things Whole Foods already does,” said McCready.

The company spokeswoman said that, to the best of her knowledge, the presentation to Whole Foods from the community group Wednesday was unprecedented for the Texas-based international grocer that calls itself, “the world’s largest retailer of natural and organic foods.”

“To my knowledge, this is the first time we’ve received this type of document from a community,” she said.

Whole Foods’ arrival and its predecessor’s closure, [first announced in January](#), have been a topic of [continued, intense debate](#).

Earlier this spring, the neighborhood council [passed by a one-vote margin](#) a measure to voice publicly that “Based on what we know now, we are concerned that Whole Foods is not a good fit for Hyde Square.”

In July, five members of the 20-member council volunteered to form the negotiating team: Area C member Karley Ausiello, At-large members Pam Bender and Francesca Fordiani, chair and Area C member Andrea Howley, and Area B member Jesse White.

The neighborhood council said four those five, excluding White, met with the company -- Area B member Steve Laferriere was the JPNC’s fifth attendee.

Representing Whole Foods at this morning’s meeting, along with McCready, were: regional president Laura Derba, regional vice president of operations Jim Hughes, executive marketing coordinator Lourdes Townsend, and store team leader Mike Walker, company officials said.

In an e-mailed statement to media, the company said:

“We feel today’s meeting with the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council resulted in much thoughtful and productive discussion. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss, in greater detail, the extensive community involvement that Whole Foods Market has in every community we serve. Whole Foods Market believes that high quality, healthy, natural foods should be accessible to everyone, and we are eager to open our doors in Jamaica Plain and have our neighbors get to know us as responsible and active community members.”

On Thursday evening, The Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council issued this statement regarding the meeting:

Yesterday, members of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council met with Whole Foods leadership to discuss issues related to the opening of its store in the Hyde Square neighborhood of Jamaica Plain.

Leading up to meeting, the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council held two community forums and created an ad-hoc committee that worked over a period of two months

the committee that worked over a period of two months to write an extensive report analyzing the effect of having Whole Foods in the neighborhood.

The JPNC considered the recommendations of the ad hoc committee, sought input and feedback from numerous community organizations, and presented those priorities to Whole Foods staff. These include transparency of Whole Foods' philanthropic efforts in Jamaica Plain and a focus on the following issues: youth, local and livable employment, small businesses, and traffic and parking. There was also a request for Whole Foods to hold community meetings in English and Spanish quarterly in store to allow for formal time to ask questions, hear developments, and raise issues related to the store.

The members of the JPNC felt that the Whole Foods staff listened to issues presented. Whole Foods provided descriptions of current corporate practices that will be carried out at the Jamaica Plain store that may address the issues put forward by the community, but did not commit to any action that is specific to our community.

They also made it known that they welcome questions and comments and have staff (including a new Marketing Liaison at the Jamaica Plain store who is a JP resident) that are able to meet with community groups and individuals to discuss concerns, partnership requests, and general questions.

However, they stated that they were unwilling to enter into any formal agreement at this time. Although no further meetings were discussed, we each agreed to continue dialogue and to work on creating a comprehensive list of specific programs Whole Foods will enact to benefit the Jamaica Plain community.

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