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JAMAICA PLAIN

Whole Foods rejects special community fund for Jamaica Plain

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Whole Foods Market, which plans to open a new new store in Jamaica Plain this fall, says it will not establish a special fund for the community, an idea [demanded of the company publicly](#) in recent months and again this week by some in the neighborhood.

"The JPNC recently requested that Whole Foods Market create a fund for use by JP community groups, which is a request that has never been made to any other retailer joining JP," the company said in a statement to Boston.com. "Creating a fund for a specific community is not how we do business, nor have we ever found it necessary given our history of community involvement. Our outlook at this time has not changed, and we are now focusing 100% of our energy on opening our new store in Jamaica Plain."

Members of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council met with Whole Foods officials last week to present a "good neighbor" agreement. However, [the company said](#) it was never asked to actually sign that deal, but simply discussed a list of requests and topics.

And the council [said in a statement last week](#) that Whole Foods representatives were "unwilling to enter into any formal agreement at this time." However, the council's chair [told the Jamaica Plain Gazette this week](#) that she believes a deal with the supermarket company is still possible.

Officials from the neighborhood council were not immediately available to comment.

Whole Foods' statement on Tuesday did not directly answer whether the company would consider signing some type of community-benefits deal. Company officials were not immediately available for further comment Wednesday morning.

A group opposing Whole Foods' plans for the new JP store [demanded Tuesday](#) that the company sign a community-benefits agreement with the neighborhood and that the deal include a yearly 1 percent donation of the store's annual revenue for the next two decades.

The [Whose Foods? Whose Community? Coalition](#) said in a letter that a deal must include a yearly 1 percent donation of the store's annual revenue for the duration of Whole Foods' 20-year lease in Jamaica Plain. And, that money should be invested toward anti-displacement and affordable housing, the group says.

The coalition formed in February, one month after Whole Foods plans for a JP

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store became public, and since then has been the chief organized group opposing the national grocer's arrival to Jamaica Plain.

"Whole Foods Market has a long history as responsible community partners, not only through our deeply rooted involvement with local programs and committees, but also through our extensive give-back programs," the grocer's statement said.

The company noted that since January, when its signing of a lease and plans to open a store in Hyde Square became public, more than \$36,000 in monetary and food donations has been donated or promised to community groups, schools and nonprofits in Jamaica Plain, "and this is just the beginning of our efforts as we are open to supporting any 501c3 that supports the causes that are important to Jamaica Plain's residents."

In related news and noted in Tuesday's statement, Whole Foods announced last week that Jennifer Licht, a seven-year JP resident and Whole Foods employee of six years, will be the new store's marketing team leader and community liaison when it opens in late fall.

An earlier press release from the company said she will be "responsible for connecting with Jamaica Plain's schools, committees and non-profits. In addition to handling store donations, her responsibilities will also include organizing store tours and hosting events and classes in-store and in the community."

"I love living in JP, and working for Whole Foods Market. The opportunity to blend the two is very exciting to me," Licht, who most recently worked as a healthy eating specialist at the company's Brighton store said in the release. "As a mom and a resident of JP, I appreciate the responsibility that we all share in supporting our neighborhood. I am eager to get started showing people how Whole Foods Market truly cares about our communities and our environment."

Below is a copy of the statement from Whole Foods:

Whole Foods Market has a long history as responsible community partners, not only through our deeply rooted involvement with local programs and committees, but also through our extensive give-back programs. We are committed to having a dedicated community market liaison at each store location whose job is to work with local community groups and non-profit organizations.

Since January, 2011, Whole Foods Market has donated or promised more than \$36,000 in monetary and food donations to JP community groups, schools and non-profit organizations, and this is just the beginning of our efforts as we are open to supporting any 501c3 that supports the causes that are important to Jamaica Plain's residents.

The JPNC recently requested that Whole Foods Market create a fund for use by JP community groups, which is a request that has never been made to any other retailer joining JP. Creating a fund for a specific community is not how we do business, nor have we ever found it necessary given our history of community involvement. Our outlook at this time has not changed, and we are now focusing 100% of our energy on opening our new store in Jamaica Plain.



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