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JAMAICA PLAIN

Jamaica Plain Whole Foods opens two days early, making Halloween debut

Posted by Matt Rocheleau November 1, 2011 10:00 AM

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A photo of the new Whole Foods in Jamaica Plain taken during a media tour the company offered on Saturday as finishing touches were put on the supermarket.

This story was updated Monday, Oct. 31, at 9 p.m. to add reports from this evening's protests:

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

After nine months of renovations and intense neighborhood debate, Whole Foods Market opened its Hyde Square store this morning, two days ahead of schedule and hours before around two dozen protesters rallied outside the supermarket this evening.

The store, which the grocer announced last week was set to open Wednesday, spans more than 13,700 square feet and has hired 104 full- and part-time workers.

“We are so pleased to open our doors in Hyde Square. We have created a beautiful store that will be a great match for the Jamaica Plain community,” store team leader, Mike Walker said in a statement. “It is particularly

PHOTOS

Jamaica Plain unveils new Whole Foods

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A time line of the controversial Whole Foods arrival in J.P.

exciting for us to have the chance now to really show our neighbors what Whole Foods Market offers as responsible, active community partners.”

Whole Foods' arrival and its predecessor's closure, [first announced in January](#), have topics of continued, [intense debate](#) in the neighborhood.

The chief grass-roots group opposing Whole Foods' arrival to the neighborhood, the Whose Foods coalition, announced last week that it planned to protest tonight outside the store. Members from the group, many in Halloween costumes, stood outside the store along Centre Street waving signs, dancing, singing, chanting, handing out candy to trick-or-treaters passing by and collecting more signatures for a petition supporting their cause.

The group said members are "in disbelief that Whole Foods Markets intends to open its store in Hyde Square ... without having committed to negotiating a Community Benefits Agreement (alternatively called a Good Neighbor Agreement)," with the neighborhood's council and community organizations.

"The struggle is far from over," said Whose Foods member 25-year-old Reed Miller wearing a large "corporate vampire" puppet costume and a label that said the CEO of Whole Foods' name, John Mackey. "We have been doing outreach to community organizations in the neighborhood and feeling out where they stand with the community benefits agreement and what components they would like to see in a community benefits agreement."

The group says it is demanding five things "in the form of a written, binding agreement: 1) Funding for affordable housing efforts, 2) Funding for Hyde Square and JP area youth programs, 3) Local independent business assistance, 4) A living wage for all JP store employees, and 5) A published traffic impact study."

Miller said the group estimates it has gathered around 400 signatures thus far and will deliver its petition and any additional signatures received to the store's manager on Wednesday.

"It's important that Whole Foods knows we're not going away, which we won't," he said.

Fellow protester Ben Mauer, looking toward the store, added: "My gut reaction is: This just feels so wrong in this neighborhood. For nine months we've been saying it's not a good fit for Hyde Square, and seeing it now, it really is not a good fit here. I feel more strongly about that today than yesterday."

Uniformed police officers detailed the store Monday night and others patrolled the sidewalks partly to monitor the protests and also because of the trick-or-treat holiday. As of 8 p.m., when the rally was scheduled to wind down, no protest incidents had been reported, police said.

Company officials declined to comment this morning on plans for a protest outside of the store tonight.

"We're here. Our doors are open and we're excited and focused on serving the community," Whole Foods spokeswoman Heather McCready said by phone from the store late this morning. "There have been so many people who have been so welcoming and are excited."

She said the store's early opening happened, in part, because of the past weekend's early arrival of winter.

"Because of the weather reports, we fast-tracked all of the food deliveries," McCready said. "Everything was here and ready, and the storm didn't hit us

that hard [in metro Boston], so we decided to open the doors."

"The word is just getting out that we're open, but some customers are here now shopping. It's pretty steady," she added.

And, this evening the store's parking lot and its building were well-populated with cars and shoppers, respectively, many who seemed unfazed by the protest outside.

The company requested customers not be photographed or interviewed on the store's property so as not to disturb them while shopping.

On a Barbara Street sidewalk headed toward the parking lot's entrance, Jamaica Plain resident Olga, carrying her 17-month-old son Emilio, who was dressed in a crayfish costume, said she and her family are "excited."

She explained that she lives within walking distance of the new store which carries specialty products that in the past she could only get at more distant stores, if at all.

The mother, a native of Guatemala, declined to give her last name because of how controversial the new store has been locally.

"The level of reaction surprised me," she said. "The supermarket before [Hi-Lo Foods] was great to have. I'm sad it's not here anymore."

And, she said about the idea some have contended that the new store could drive up rental rates and the general cost of living: "I don't like that side of it ... But, I think it's a nice addition to the neighborhood."

The building at the corner of Centre and Barbara streets, formerly a Hi-Lo Foods grocery store for nearly five decades, had its interior overhauled over the past several months.

In February, Whole Foods signed a 20-year lease with the building's owner, the parent company of Hi-Lo, Newton-based Knapp Foods, Inc.

Whole Foods says its store is "modeled for energy efficiency," and "boasts a number of green technologies, including LED lighting and state of the art refrigeration systems."

There are 68 parking spots in an existing lot in front of the grocery store. The lot also features an electric car charging station, racks for 15 bicycles and a self-service bike repair station.

"No two Whole Foods Market stores are alike. Each store is designed to reflect the community it serves," the international, Texas-based organic chain supermarket company announced today. "Whole Foods Market Jamaica Plain was designed to echo the vibrant culture of Hyde Square, while paying homage to the Googie style of architecture that makes the building so unique."

"The products carried in Whole Foods Market Jamaica Plain are also a reflection of the community," Whole Foods added in a release. "From locally produced to ethnically influenced selections, the shelves are stocked with affordably priced products that meet the company's strict quality standards."

Departments include: grocery, produce, meat, seafood, specialty, bakery, body care, and bulk, which features beans, grains, nuts, seeds and dried fruits. A prepared food section offers a salad bar, hot bar, pizza oven and Panini station

"Whole Foods Market Jamaica Plain is unlike any of our other stores," Walker said in the statement. "We are so excited for longtime Whole Foods Market shoppers and the folks who haven't ever had the opportunity to shop with us before, to come see what we have created just for them."

Earlier this spring, the Jamaica Plain 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.”

The council went on to form an ad-hoc committee over the summer that issued a [69-page report](#) on the supermarket chain's planned arrival.

Recently, five members of the 20-member council [met with Whole Foods](#) officials to present a "good neighbor" agreement, based in part on that earlier report, and hoped to negotiate a formal deal with the company.

But, council members said they were told by company officials that Whole Foods was [unwilling](#) to enter into any formal agreement. The [company has specifically rejected](#) the notion of establishing a special fund for the community, an idea [demanded](#) of the company publicly in recent months by some in the neighborhood.

The company has said it feels its stores already offer much of what was being asked of the JP store. The store will be open daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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