
Whole Foods a bit closer to downtown
By Sherri Buri McDonald
The Register-Guard
Published: Friday, November 11, 2005

The much talked-about possibility of a Whole Foods Market coming to downtown Eugene is now a step closer to reality.

The natural and organic food retailer said Thursday that it has signed a lease for future space on East Broadway where it intends to open a store in 2007.

With 52,000 square feet of retail space, the planned Eugene store would be even bigger than Whole Foods' store in Portland, said Gretchen Krueger, a spokeswoman for the international chain.

The Whole Foods in Portland's Brewery Blocks, at the southwest edge of the city's popular Pearl District, helped revitalize that part of town.

Russ Brink, executive director of Downtown Eugene Inc. - a downtown advocacy group - called Whole Foods' commitment "great news" and "a key step in bringing the whole project together."

"There are still steps in the process," he said. "But having the lease is obviously a significant milestone."

The other steps Brink refers to are a proposed land swap between the city and another nearby property owner, which would increase the land available for the Whole Foods development, and the construction of a public parking garage that would augment the 200 parking spaces planned atop the 1 1/2 -story Whole Foods store.

Nan Laurence, an associate planner with the city and project manager for the Whole Foods project, said that the city has not yet received a site plan from the property owners/developers, so "I cannot yet tell you what the nature of our participation will be in terms of the property transaction or garage construction."

However, she said, "We're looking at the Whole Foods project as a very positive development, and the signing of the lease as an important step for that project."

Construction activity at the site could begin as early as the first half of 2006, Krueger said.

An investment group led by Dan Giustina, which owns the half-block parcel at East Broadway and High Street earmarked for the store, has been courting Whole Foods since early this year.

The investment group, which is called Broadway & Pearl Associates and is composed mainly of local members of the Giustina family, would own the building and lease it to Whole Foods.

Portland-based Gerding Edlen Development Co. would oversee development of the building.

The lease for the Eugene site is just one of nine that fast-growing Whole Foods recently secured in communities ranging from Chandler, Ariz., to London, England.

Since opening its new landmark store and headquarters in Austin, Texas, in February, Whole Foods has adopted a larger floor plan with a village-style layout and more dining-in space than its earlier stores, Kreuger said.

Company officials told analysts Thursday that they believe the larger format appeals to a broader customer base, takes longer to reach maximum capacity and is less vulnerable to competition as it creates a higher barrier for those seeking to enter the market.

The stores aren't just a place to fill up a grocery cart and head home, but are a source for hot and cold prepared foods for take-out or to dine in.

Operating hours vary by location, but most stores typically open at 7:30 a.m. or 8 a.m. and close by 10 p.m., she said.

New stores usually have about 230 employees - 95 percent of them full time, Krueger said. The company doesn't release specifics about wages and benefits, but they would be very competitive for the Eugene-Springfield market, she said.

Hiring for the store would begin two to three months before the store opens in 2007, Krueger said.

Whole Foods wanted to expand into Eugene because of the community's large and growing interest in natural and organic foods, she said, adding that the company is eager to be part of the growth in downtown.

Whole Foods, the world's largest natural and organic foods supermarket, has 179 stores in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The company reported a profit of \$136.4 million on sales of \$4.7 billion in the 12 months ended Sept. 25. This was up from a profit of \$129.5 million on sales of \$3.9 billion in the previous year.

Natural & Organic Foods

Over 2,000 dry & frozen foods 10% off first order. Use code WG10

Organic Food

Bargain prices on Organic Food Search over 200,000 stores!

[Ads by Goooooogle](#)