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A Fresh and Easy for Downtown

By Bryon L. Richards

A possible new addition to downtown Long Beach seems to be making everyone happy according to blogs and other news sources.

Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market, a British version of Trader Joe's, is working on getting into downtown Long Beach.

"The potential introduction of a new Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market will bring downtown Long Beach residents the convenient, affordable and – most important of all – healthy shopping option that they have been lacking for far too long," said Randy Gordon, president of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

Gordon summed it up pretty well and everyone seems to agree. First District Councilmember Robert Garcia led a letter-writing campaign to bring the community into the process of securing a Fresh and

Easy in the downtown area, specifically the CityPlace shopping center that already houses a Wal-Mart.

According to Garcia, there is no better place for Fresh & Easy to spread its roots than downtown Long Beach where residents can be introduced to a new convenient and healthy way of providing for their families.

The Fresh & Easy store format was designed to serve all types of neighborhoods, including those that have been traditionally underserved. At 14,000 square feet (4,000 for backroom storage), the stores are smaller than typical supermarkets (35-55,000 total square feet) with easy-to-shop aisles to offer a faster, easier shopping experience.

"Based on extensive research, we've built a store from the ground up for American customers. We found customers were shopping lots of different stores to piece together their weekly shopping trip, so we put together a format to simplify customer's lives," said Simon Uwins, chief marketing officer of Fresh & Easy.

Residents of the Lakewood area have already benefitted from its two recent locations.

Among all of its other downtown projects, the Long Beach Redevelopment Agency (RDA) also wants to help it along.

According to Amy Bodek, RDA assistant executive director, the RDA is considering possible incentives for the CityPlace property owner for improvements to the property to accommodate the new store location.

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"CityPlace is within the downtown Redevelopment Project Area and Fresh and Easy would provide a very strong benefit for downtown residences" said Bodek.

Bodek reiterated that the RDA wasn't providing incentives to Fresh and Easy, only to the CityPlace property owner.

Besides its inherent shopping values, they provide competitive employment that stays local (more than half its employees live less than four miles from work). They are an environmental leader that uses energy-efficient light bulbs, promotes recycling and donates proceeds to neighborhood schools.

"In welcoming Fresh & Easy, we are not only welcoming a new grocery store, but a new community partner, neighbor, and friend," said Gordon.

Everyone involved, the city of Long Beach and its residences see this as being extremely important for the future development of Downtown Long Beach. The Fresh & Easy would serve as a key anchor that would open up new opportunities for quality retail.

More information about Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market can be found at www.freshandeasy.com.