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Plan for new Whole Foods takes shape After a year of talks, BLVD Place to be home for scaled-down store

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After at least a year of negotiations, Whole Foods Market has set plans for a new store in BLVD Place, the mixed-use development at the corner of Post Oak Boulevard and San Felipe.

The Austin-based upscale grocery chain will lease 48,500 square feet in the project, where overall development has slowed because of the economy.

While the grocery store will be considerably smaller than the 80,000-square-foot store the company originally planned, locking in the market was a key ingredient to the success of the larger project.



WHAT'S AHEAD: Construction on the Whole Foods Market, shown in this rendering, is scheduled to start by next summer, with the opening expected to be in late 2012 or early 2013.

is expected to have 400,000 square feet of specialty shops and restaurants with about 325,000 square feet of office space above the retail.

High-rise canceled

When the 20-acre project was announced in 2006, however, it also was expected to have hundreds of high-rise residential units and a luxury hotel. The economic downturn scuttled those plans.

Whole Foods also reacted to the economy. Stung by flagging consumer spending, the grocer began terminating leases and downsizing planned stores.

Locally, the 80,000-square

-foot Whole Foods originally proposed for BLVD Place would have been on par with the company's flagship market in Austin, where customers can eat at in-store restaurants, choose from hundreds of kinds of beer and cheeses, and visit a seafood counter that smokes, slices and fries to order.

Construction on the market is scheduled to start by next summer, with the opening expected in late 2012 or early 2013.

Underground garage

The store will have an underground garage with room for 300 cars. Shoppers

will take a moving sidewalk from the garage directly into the store.

So far, 73,000 square feet of office and retail space has been built and leased in BLVD Place.

Whole Foods marks the second phase of development, which in addition to the market will include 140,000 square feet of shops, restaurants and offices.

No leases have been signed on that additional space yet, but the devel-

oper said the interest level by prospective tenants has increased over the past six months.

Wulfe also said the residential developer who bought land on the property to build a 37-story tower once slated for the site is looking at the project again.

Having high-end super-market anchor a mixed-use center has proven an attractive component to potential residents, said Anita Kramer, senior director of retail and mixed-use development at the Urban Land Institute.

"Whole Foods has just turned out to be a really good draw," she said.



"If we were going to do retail, we needed an anchor store that created high energy and high traffic. Nobody's better than doing that than Whole Foods," said developer Ed Wulfe, president of Wulfe & Co.

Ultimately, BLVD Place