

Whole Foods bows out

■ Traffic, parking concerns at Live Oak site prove too much for national chain store to overcome.

By JENNIFER PITTMAN
Sentinel business editor

✓ LIVE OAK — Whole Foods, the natural foods chain looking for a home in Santa Cruz, has backed off its plans to move into a 27,000-square-foot building in Live Oak. 1-15-00

Parking and traffic concerns proved insurmountable for the national grocery chain, said Carl Sprague of PacCom Management in Watsonville. Sprague manages the corner property site on 17th Avenue and Soquel Road where the store had hoped to locate.

"It was just decided that Whole Foods would probably look for another location," Sprague said.

It was unclear Friday whether the Texas-based company was still hoping to find another location in the Santa Cruz area. Calls to the Whole Food offices in Austin, Tex., were not returned Friday.

Neighborhood opposition to the store was strong, largely because it was expected to draw more than 1,900 new car trips to the already heavily traveled area.

Community meetings, organized by a consultant hired by local health food stores, drew as many as 100 people to discuss the issues.

"I think it was the neighborhood's victory," said Aptos Natural Foods owner Bryan Smith.

"From a citizen's point of view, I'm pleased," Smith said. "As a business person, Whole Foods is a pretty scary proposition. It's certainly a victory for small independents."

For now, it means local store owners can focus on their own businesses.

"My own hunch is we're still on the radar screen," said Richard Josephson, co-owner of Staff of Life, a natural foods store in Santa Cruz. "We're just on the middle burner instead of the front burner."

County Supervisor Jan Beautz, who represents the