

Whole Foods

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area, had expressed strong reservations about the project.

When county planners objected to a lack of parking space, Whole Foods proposed an employee parking lot nearby on Paul Minnie Avenue. The location, however, was farther from the store than was allowed by code.

"I think the rules should apply to everybody, but I have the feeling that bigger stores that are national have the feeling they can get around some of these local ordinances," Beautz said. "I don't think that's fair. We make local stores comply with these rules. It was clear

from the beginning they were trying to put too much on that site."

In December, the company was still fine-tuning the project for county planners, and the Transportation Commission was considering traffic issues.

Within the last week BT Commercial real estate broker James Wiseman posted a for-lease sign in front of the property. The building, located next to Staples office supplies, is now occupied by West Marine.

Sprague said there's already been some interest in the building, which is zoned for commercial office and retail use.

The property is owned by Santa Cruz Freeholders, a

private limited partnership. Randy Repass, chief executive officer of West Marine, is majority share holder.

Repass had been working with Whole Foods for more than a year.

"We are anticipating that it will lease up rather quickly," Sprague said.

Other development proposals in Mid-County, such as plans to build a 130,000-square-foot Home Depot store at the north end of 41st Avenue on Soquel Drive, face similar parking and traffic-flow obstacles.

"The last time I saw they didn't have enough parking, there were some riparian corridor issues and there is traffic," Beautz said.