



Jane Charmelo

# out & about

## A new grocery store may be on the horizon

Lombard may be closer to getting a grocery store toward the north side, thanks to the persistent efforts of the Prairie Food Co-op (PFC).

Jerry Nash—who, along with his wife Kathy, has been instrumental in launching the idea of a food co-operative in the Lilac Village—believes the co-op he envisioned is progressing beyond a concept and some shareholders to the possibility of having a bricks and mortar store to call home.

On Wednesday, Feb. 7, Nash outlined that the co-op is working with a developer to hopefully get retail space at the corner of Parkside and Main, which is currently owned by the village.

This could be the start of a good partnership of sorts, Nash said, as the village has been hoping to get a grocer interested in the location, and the PFC has been looking for the right location—and size—to call home.

The Nashes had lived in Urbana, which had a cooperative, Nash related, back in 2014, where he and Kathy had volunteered. He also worked as the bakery manager for a local natural foods store.

They moved to Lombard in 2010, and the roots of the cooperative go back as far as 2012, when they began to plant the seeds of an idea to have it located in Lombard; they subsequently held an orientation meeting.

They had wanted to get like-minded individuals to band together and form a cooperative to sell locally grown and sustainable products, according to Nash, from farmers and growers who are transparent about how their food is grown.

Back in 2014, there were just under 260 members, and he was looking “north of 1,000 members” in order to open a store.

By 2016, there were 543 “owners,” according to a story in “Out and About,” in which Nash provided an update on the quest for a home.

Nash said there is a process in place prior to starting up any co-operative, which is that of doing a feasibility study on potential locations. This includes looking at demographics, entrances and exits, traffic patterns, and if the location is “financially viable and profitable,” to name a few.

He mentioned that the studies were held in 2015 and 2017 at a few undisclosed locations, adding that getting new shareholders and moving toward finding a home are “owner milestones you want to hit.”



Jerry Nash spoke at the Helen Plum Library on Wednesday, Feb. 7, to discuss a possible location for the Prairie Food Co-op, which does not have its own store yet, but has a growing number of owners who are hoping to find one in the near future. The cooperative won an award in spring 2017 called the Cooperative Citizen Award, from the Food Co-op Initiative (FCI), a national non-profit organization devoted to helping food cooperatives.

In 2016, Nash indicated the co-operative was looking at something around 10,000 square feet based on one of the market studies, which would include retail space of between 7,000 and 8,000 square feet (Nash emphasized then and now that the former Mr. Z’s store is “too big, too prohibitive to renovate.”). Now the co-op is looking to utilize between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet of retail space on a ground level, according to a PFC press release.

He said the co-op was looking for existing space, and had not considered that a developer might build retail space the PFC could rent.

Nash said it was through word of mouth that the PFC connected with a potential developer, and discussions began about possibly renting first-floor space should the developer end up taking over the lot at Main and Parkside.

Bill Heniff, director of community development, said that last year, the village had put out an RFP, or request for proposals, seeking a developer to put a grocery store in that location.

The former DuPage Theatre stood on that site, which was, for a time, owned by Big Idea Productions (think “Veggie Tales”), and was later donated to the Village of Lombard. The theater building was torn down in 2007.

However, said the director, there were “no parties who expressed an interest at the time,” so the village board offered new direction for an RFP, that would hopefully draw interest from multi-use developers.

Heniff said the RFP will be open until April 16, after which time the village will consider proposals that had come in. They would be evaluated by the Economic and Community Development Committee, he continued, after which a recommendation would be made to the village board as a whole.

“We’re looking for a development that adds value to the downtown,” Heniff commented, adding that the village is neutral as to the nature of the developer/businesses, so long as they fall with zoning and ordinance requirements.

As for Nash, he said ownership is up to 768, and the cooperative will look to the owners for “loans” to get a physical store up and running, if and when the developer secures

that property.

The PFC, he continued, was looking for a developer “who un-

derstands the value of us being an anchor retail,” and added that the cooperative needs to raise roughly

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— Jerry Nash

\$2.5 million to start its capital campaign.

So, Nash said, up until now, the PFC was “in a holding pattern in the last couple of years,” but now, as he sees it, “Things are about to really speed up.”

He sees having a cooperative as a benefit to Lombard, saying, “We believe it will be a destination shopping place. I think that it will be a boost to downtown Lombard.”

At the same time, a cooperative supports local farmers and food producers, “as much local, as much sustainable as possible,” Nash said, concluding, “We’ve gotten a groundswell of positive reaction.”

For more information, visit [www.prairiefood.coop](http://www.prairiefood.coop), where you can sign a site petition (click on store location), or visit them on Facebook.

For more information on the village’s RFP, visit [www.villageoflombard.org](http://www.villageoflombard.org).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JERRY NASH Lombardian/Villa Park Review



The property for sale is 2.19 acres from 101-109 S. Main St., Lombard, which is owned by the Village of Lombard. It is the site of the former DuPage Theatre. Big Idea Productions donated the property to the village in 2000, and the theater came down in 2007. The village is seeking developers for the property, and the Prairie Food Co-op hopes to be an anchor store in that location, as part of larger development.

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