

Plan Advances to Convert Ellicott City Superfresh Store to Shoppers Food & Pharmacy

By Bruce Vail | Email the author | June 3, 2011

New owner intends to offer jobs to all the existing Superfresh workers at the store.

Employees at the Superfresh grocery store in Ellicott City will be offered jobs by the new owners when the store is converted to Shoppers Food & Pharmacy this summer, according to court documents filed this week in a New York bankruptcy court.



About 80 employees at the store will be offered jobs with Shoppers Food, and the company will recognize their existing labor union for collective bargaining purposes, according to a proposed sale agreement filed in the court by Superfresh's parent company.

"It's a good outcome for our members in Ellicott City. Of course we are pleased," said Tim Goins, executive vice president of Towson-based United Food & Commercial Workers Local 27.

The proposed sale by Superfresh corporate parent Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. (or A&P) is subject to approval by a federal bankruptcy court in White Plains,

NY. A hearing to approve the sale is scheduled for June 14.

A&P, which operates more than 300 stores in the mid-Atlantic region, entered bankruptcy court in late 2010, citing heavy debts and high labor costs.

Since then, A&P has been closing or selling stores in several states, including the planned closings of 25 Superfresh markets in Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia.

Exactly 83 employees at the Ellicott City store received notices in early May that their jobs would be terminated by Superfresh, according to the Maryland state labor agency.

The 83 Ellicott City workers are among 1,477 Superfresh employees statewide who have been notified that their jobs are to be eliminated, said Mike Raia, a spokesman for the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation.

One grocery industry expert commented that the Ellicott City store is one of the most attractive that Superfresh has put up for sale.

"It's a premier facility of almost 57,000 square feet that opened in 1998 and has been very successful from Day One," said Robert Gorland, vice president of the consulting firm Matthew P. Casey & Associates.

“This was a better-run Superfresh and the store had an expanded produce department and most extra service departments. It’s a strategic location for Shoppers, yet I don’t expect nearby Safeway, Mars, Giant and international markets to roll over and play dead,” Gorland said.

“The greater Ellicott City area has a strong diversity of residents and Shoppers will likely maintain Superfresh’s produce and perishables presentation. They are also well known for offering expanded ethnic merchandising,” he said

Shoppers Food spokesman Steve Sylven said more information about plans for the new store would be available after the sales transaction has been officially finalized, which is expected shortly after the June 14 court hearing.

Bowie-based Shoppers Food & Pharmacy currently operates 55 stores in Maryland and Northern Virginia. It is a subsidiary of Minneapolis-based Supervalu Inc., one of the largest owners of grocery chains nationwide.