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Food Lion pounces on land in Swatara

The chain is considering building a shopping center -- anchored by their store -- on 16 acres near Route 441 and Chambers Hill Road.

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A North Carolina-based grocery store chain is hoping to take the lion's share of the grocery business in Swatara Twp.

Food Lion, which has stores in Franklin and York counties and has begun to branch farther north, recently announced it acquired 16 acres near Route 441 and Chambers Hill Road.

Food Lion is at least the second developer of the property, dubbed Orchard Park.

Swatara Twp. has been trying to entice a grocery store to that area for a long time, said Richard Bazdar, director of codes enforcement. "You have to pretty much go to Weis at Swatara Square or out to Hershey."

While it's still early in the process, Food Lion spokeswoman Christy Phillips-Brown said the company anticipates constructing a shopping center with Food Lion as an anchor.

David Livingston, a market analyst who runs Wisconsin-based DJL Research, said competition among grocery stores in the Harrisburg region is fierce.

"You've got all the major players," Livingston said. "I don't see room for a below-market performer."

Livingston said that Food Lion's stores have performed about 20 percent below the average of their competitors on a weekly basis.

Food Lion's Phillips-Brown said the stores work to ingrain themselves in the communities they serve through philanthropic efforts, along with offering "great value, great prices and quality products."

The fact that Food Lion is targeting a somewhat underserved area might work in its favor, said Bob Gorland, vice president of Harrisburg's Matthew P. Casey & Associates.

Gorland, whose company specializes in supermarket and shopping center feasibility studies, said Food Lion made several forays into the Harrisburg market more than a decade ago.

While those stores didn't last, Gorland said it's possible Food Lion can win market share -- if it puts its best people, store design and prices forward