

Willy West hits halfway mark on expansion and the co-op's 3 stores top \$50 million in sales

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Willy Street Co-op's store in Middleton has reached the halfway point in a \$2.25 million remodeling and expansion project. And it comes as the co-op has announced a record year in sales for its three stores.

The construction project, which includes an additional 3,500-square-feet, is on budget and is expected to be completed by the middle of October, according to Kirsten Moore, the co-op's services director and project manager of the Willy West project.

Once it is completed, the store will have two additional checkout lanes, wider aisles and new bathrooms. What had been a UPS store will be home to a juice bar, cheese department, community room with a certified test kitchen, more dine-in seating and an expanded beer cooler. One of the first steps in the remodeling of the space was lowering the floor by eight inches so it would match that of the existing 10,000-square-foot store.



This rendering shows the new cheese department with a sampling station at the Willy Street Co-op in Middleton. A \$2.25 million expansion and remodeling project is increasing the 10,000-square-foot store to 13,500-square-feet and making more room for cheese, juice, beer and wine plus widening store aisles and checkout lanes.

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With the floor completed, the build-out by Vogel Bros. Construction is kicking into high gear as the framing for the juice bar, cheese department and beer cooler are nearing completion.

"It'll make our store more homey," Herika Kummel, a manager at Willy West said Monday during a tour of the property. "The front of store will look wider and bigger."



The new cheese department is beginning to take shape at Willy West in Middleton. The new addition is in space that at one time was home to a neighboring UPS store.

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Once the new addition is completed, the cheese, juice, beer and wine departments will shift out of their current space and into the new location. That will then allow for aisles and checkout lanes to be widened, a move that is expected to provide more room for shoppers and lessen congestion. The produce section, for example, will get more space, making it easier to highlight sales.

The entry area will be enlarged and a new customer service desk installed while the wellness department will be relocated and include a help desk. The improvements will also allow for more end-caps on aisles making sale products easier to find; there will be a new area for grab-and-go products such as sandwiches and wraps and bathrooms will be upgraded and made gender-neutral.



Aisles at Willy West in Middleton will soon be wider as part of a \$2.25 million project scheduled to be completed in October.
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In February, the co-op, with more than 35,000 members, reached its goal of \$640,000 in a bond drive for the project at 6825 University Ave. in the Parkwood Plaza strip mall. Members approved the expansion plan in a vote in July 2017 and approved a second ballot initiative to pursue another expansion of the co-op. No sites or projects have been identified, but it could include a fourth store or expanding the co-op's production kitchen.



The customer service area at the Willy Street Co-op in Middleton will be getting bigger as part of a \$2.25 million remodeling and expansion project. The nearby produce department will also have more space once the project is completed in October.
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Earlier this month, Anya Firszt, the co-op's general manager, reported that the just completed 2018 fiscal year was "a banner year" for the co-op's three stores.

Firszt said sales were "greater than budgeted, planned losses less than budgeted, and that we finally topped the \$50 million annual sales milestone."



Herika Kummel, a manager at Willy Street Co-op in Middleton, looks over the framed-in area that will hold a new and expanded beer cooler. BARRY ADAMS, STATE JOURNAL

Beer, wine and cider were added to Willy East and starting wages were increased, staff evaluations reinstated, employees were awarded pay-for-performance raises, and pay ranges were updated with pay adjustments, Firszt said, in her column in the July Willy Street Co-op Reader.

In the next year, Willy North will see an additional cash register lane while Willy East will get new flooring in the commons.