



EXTRA: SEPT. 25/10

COUNCIL APPROVES WAL-MART AS THE GATEWAY TO MISSION

Mission Council has opened the door to Wal-mart without the knowledge or consent of the community. Due to its controversial business practices, Wal-mart's forays into communities always provokes discussion and debate. Instead of allowing the public to debate the Wal-mart issue, a Public Hearing for "Fraser Valley Shopping Center" was quietly held Aug. 30, a time when many citizens are on holiday and families are busy preparing for back to school. No mention was made that Wal-Mart would be the anchor store to the center in either the Public Hearing notice or in the background staff report. Senior planner Dayle Reti's report only said, "there could be an impact on the existing commercial businesses in Mission if this development is constructed, dependent upon which businesses locate within the buildings. However, it is noted that preliminary estimates within the District of Mission Employment Lands Strategy suggest retail leakage to other communities is approximately \$100 million per year".

The retail "leakage" argument wrongly assumes that profits made by Wal-Mart stay in the local community. After reviewing considerable research, local Mission resident Sieglinde Stieda concluded "Wal-Mart has made ghost towns out of Trail and Williams Lake and many other small communities, by squashing local businesses. Money spent at Wal-Mart mostly leaves the community. Money spent at local businesses recirculates in a community helping to make it vibrant".

Following the Public Hearing, when word began to spread about the identity of the mystery big box store, Mission Council stated it was now "illegal" for them to listen to what the public had to say. Citizens who waited 3 ½ hours to express their concerns at the Sept. 20 question period were declared "out of order". The proposal unanimously passed 3rd reading at which time each Councilor attempted to justify their vote as follows.

Councilor Paul Horn on consumer choice: *"I'm about to vote for Wal-mart even though I'm not a Wal-mart fan. ...If you don't approve of a business then don't go there."* This comment fails to realize that predatory pricing removes consumer's choice to shop at small local businesses. According to a June 2009 study by university researchers led by the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, Wal-Mart's entry into a new market has a profound impact on its retail competition. When a Wal-Mart opens in a new market, median sales drop 40% at similar high-volume stores, 17% at supermarkets and 6% at drugstores, a fact well known to small businesses. "I talked to almost every downtown businessman and woman yesterday, 95 per cent were against Wal-Mart coming to Mission. I was amazed at the level of awareness of these business people as to the destructiveness of Wal-Mart to small towns. Several people said, 'If Wal-Mart comes in, my business will go under; I'll go bankrupt.'" " Kevin Francis, Cinema Politica.

Councilor Heather Stewart on impacts to the downtown core: *"I still have faith the downtown will develop better even though we have another mall... I still have hope for the downtown"*. Council's decisions should be made on the basis of facts not faith, which sadly are completely lacking in this proposal. Wal-mart will be the final death nail to many struggling downtown businesses. Perhaps Council has taken revitalization to mean kill the downtown and rebuild something new.

Mayor James Atebe on the environment: *"I heard kids say, why do I need to travel to Abbotsford to work at Wal-Mart? It is not environmentally sound to commute to other Wal-Marts."* To imply that having a

local Wal-Mart is environmentally responsible ignores the stacks of research which criticize both the products that the retailer sells and the long distances these product are shipped. There is no evidence that this Wal-Mart will benefit the environment and factual evidence that the proposed site will expand our community's carbon footprint and car dependency. The 9-acre site is heavily treed and close to the Fraser River making it prime habitat for listed wildlife. Mission's environmental manager Mike Younie admits that no environmental assessment was done for the proposal. The plan is to completely pave over the site for 400+ parking spaces.

Further environmental destruction was foreshadowed by this comment by Councilor Danny Plecas: *"This is an opportunity to bring people back to the community. Another development is coming on the north side of the Lougheed which I will support as well"*. The "other" development is a junction sized strip mall proposed for the sensitive ravine ecosystem directly adjacent to the Silver Creek wetlands. Craig Scainkowy of Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada has already recommended that this development be redesigned or relocated because it is critical habitat necessary for the health of the Silver Creek wetlands. No public hearing has been held on the development proposal, so like the Wal-Mart development, Councilor Plecas has made his decision without the benefit of public input.

Finally, the issue of Wal-Mart's low paying jobs was justified this way by Councilor Mike Scudder: *"Mission has waited a long time for this shopping experience. The wages are not what we'd like but it could be a good second income for some. The community has spoken very loudly for this"*. The community can hardly have spoken loudly when they were not informed of the plan. The University of Missouri found that a new Wal-Mart store increases net retail employment in the county by 100 jobs in the short term, half of which disappear over five years as other retail establishments close. The jobs created are very low paying limiting the buying power of its employees. "The largest class action lawsuit in the history of the world alleges that Wal-Mart discriminated against women by systematically denying them promotions and paying them less than men. This lawsuit involves one million women and 3,000 Wal-Mart stores" concerned citizen, Catherine McDonald. Locating Wal-Mart at the gateway to our community brands Mission as open for business, no matter how controversial or unethical their practices.

Clearly, Mission Council has not done its homework. By denying citizens the opportunity to speak to the issue of whether or not they want Wal-Mart, they have also lost touch with the community. In the final analysis, Mission council's desperation for development at any cost flies against all tenants of sustainability. There is strong evidence that Wal-Mart will destroy Mission's local economy, and that the proposed site will trigger negative impacts to some of the most environmentally sensitive land in Mission. Council's deceptive tactics, designed to deny citizens their right to an open, transparent, and democratic process, has diminished the long-term economic, environmental and social sustainability of our community.

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