

Commission supports Wal-Mart requests

By Steve Van Dien
Correspondent

On March 13, the Hartford Plan Commission approved three key measures toward bringing a Wal-Mart Supercenter – and concurrent annual revenue over \$92,000 – to the city.

The commission voted unanimously to approve a landscaping concept plan for the massive project, which is proposed for the area across from the Pleasant Hill Cemetery on Highway 60. Commissioners also unanimously approved annexing the land from the town of Hartford, as well as rezoning it for community and highway business use. The area, owned by Gary Doll – who requested that the city annex the property – covers some 43 acres. The proposed Supercenter would cover 22 acres. There will be two additional commercially-zoned lots near Highway 60, covering about 8.5 acres. The remaining acreage comprises wetlands. Commissioner Dennis Regan cast the only dissenting vote against approving the developer's agreement. Regan expressed concern about drivers' access to the Supercenter, which he considered insufficiently addressed in the developer's agreement.

At the Plan Commission's March 13 meeting, Mayor Scott Henke opened the floor to any residents wishing to address the commission regarding the Wal-Mart plans. Only three did so, with two favoring the project and one opposing it.

"I think everything looks excellent," said Veronica Cook.

"I'm in favor of the development, and of progress," said Ken Kreager.

Between Cook's and Kreager's comments, Scott Lopas cited his concerns about the project.

Lopas told the commission that if they approved bringing the Supercenter to the city, "in the eyes of some residents, you'll be heroes [for] bringing lower prices to Hartford. But there is a cost for those lower prices."

"I think there's a perception in the community that public input isn't likely to make a difference" regarding the project, Lopas said.

Lopas read a petition from about 200 residents, who believed the development "... [would] have an adverse impact on Hartford and the surrounding communities, and it is not consistent with the character of our community."

Lopas also described the residents' concerns over the development's potential for creating environmental and traffic problems. Local business owners could suffer loss of employees and revenue to the Wal-Mart, Lopas said, adding that Hartford residents have easy access to Supercenters in neighboring communities.

"We're literally surrounded by [them]," he said.

"Are we willing to take the risk? Will this genuinely be an improvement for the city of Hartford?"

Commissioner R. W. Witt responded that some previous proposals for Hartford businesses raised initial concerns about potential problems, which ultimately did not come to pass.

"Everything evens out," Witt said.

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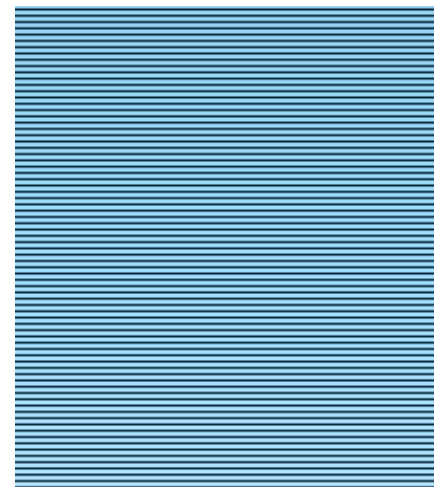
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The proposed Supercenter would cover about 184,000 square feet. It would provide groceries and general merchandise, along with an outdoor garden center and a Tire Lube Express outlet. The latter wouldn't provide full auto services, but it would offer new tires and windshield wipers, plus oil changes.

The area will also include pedestrian and bike paths, plus four heavily landscaped islands in the parking area. The islands will "break up the expanse of asphalt," said City Planner Justin Drew in his executive summary.

Ultimately, Hartford would receive the annual revenue from the Supercenter at the present tax rate of \$6.59 per \$1,000 of valuation, Drew said. The project now faces final yeas or nays at the Common Council's next meeting at 7 p.m. March 28. Residents will also have their final opportunity to support or oppose the development at a public hearing during the meeting.



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