

Approval doesn't deter opponents

Environmental, legal challenges next

By PHILLIP HERMANN
Daily News Staff

HARTFORD — A day after a Wal-Mart became a reality for the city, opponents of the retail giant were still in a fighting mood.

Tuesday, the Hartford Common Council approved the annexation, rezoning and developer's agreement necessary for the construction of the 183,198-square-foot store on 22 acres on Highway 60 West near the Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

One of the organizers of the Wal-Mart opposition movement, Marilyn Raschka, said she was "extremely disappointed" by the approval.

"We, the opposition, turned out in force (at a public hearing Tuesday) to speak and they just didn't listen," Raschka said. "We had petitions with nearly a 1,000 signatures. Even though about 200 of them were not city of Hartford residents, we asked people to sign if they thought their quality of life would be negatively affected by this Wal-Mart. It's going to impact this entire community — this was a community issue — not just those who live inside the city limits."

Raschka said she and other opponents of Wal-Mart are looking into other ways to fight the development, either on legal grounds or because of environmental impact concerns that she believes haven't been addressed.

In addition, Raschka said she hopes city voters are paying attention.

"I hope this will have a longer-term political impact, but that's really up to the citizens. Hey, anybody can run for office," she added.

At the public hearing, about 30 people spoke against the Wal-Mart plan. There also were four speakers who supported the development. About 200 people attended the meeting.

Opponents came from all over southeastern Wisconsin to raise concerns that Wal-Mart will lead to the closing of downtown businesses and other small-business ventures in the center. They also said the store will aggravate traf-

By the numbers

■ **183,198 square feet** divided into three areas — grocery, retail and garden. By comparison, the Kmart and Sentry Foods stores on Bell Avenue total 155,000 square feet of shopping space.

■ **\$14 million** is the estimated value of the development at build-out. That doesn't include two out-parcel tracks zoned to accommodate restaurants and smaller commercial ventures.

■ **\$92,000** in additional property tax revenue for the city of Hartford, about one-third of the total property tax revenue that will be generated by the development. Other portions will go to the school system, county and town of Hartford.

■ **No. 1** — At build-out, the Wal-Mart will be the largest retail development in the city.

■ **42.715 acres** is the span for the entire development — the Wal-Mart Supercenter will utilize 22.4 acres of that total; the two commercial lots have 8.5 acres; .9 of an acre will be designated as conservancy, protected natural space; and the remainder will be utilized for interior roads, rights-of-way for the widened Highway 60 (Sumner Street), pedestrian walkways and a bike trail.

Talk back

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fic congestion problems on Highway 60 and nearby streets, leading to the possibility of more accidents and injuries.

Environmentally, opponents said runoff created by the project could harm nearby wetlands and eventually have a negative impact on the Rubicon River.

However, Wal-Mart officials and City Planner Justin Drew told the crowd that the retailer

Please see WAL-MART/A9

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Wal-Mart: Impact questioned

has complied with all city mandates regarding traffic improvements, water retention facilities and environmental buffers. Drew said the project also will be monitored by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to make sure requirements are followed.

Wal-Mart spokesman John Bisio said the store will create up to 300 jobs with an average pay of \$10.50 per hour. It will join the Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce and will provide donations for area causes, something the company has done consistently in the past in the communities where it has stores, he said.

But opponents are far from trumpeting the store's arrival.

Jeff Gonyo, a resident of the town of Polk and leader of the Highway J Citizens Group, said the council didn't take enough time to study all the environmental and economic ramifications of the Wal-Mart.

"Do you really want downtown Hartford to become a ghost town lined with empty buildings?" he asked. "You are the employees and the people — in this audience — are your employers."

Quinn Ayers, a St. Francis residents and representative of the United Food & Commercial Workers Union, predicted that when Wal-Mart is operational, one of the city's two existing grocery stores will close.

"Wal-Mart is a burden to our great state," he said.

Hartford resident Pete Engelke said Wal-Mart's impact on the community's traffic and quality of life will be like a "tidal wave."

He added: "This community is not prepared to handle this kind of thing — this size of a store. I like Hartford the way it is and I think it will be big, drastic mistake to bring a Wal-Mart to Hartford."

Stephen Zelmer of Watertown, representing the United Cooperative on Highway 60 located near the store's site, said he's concerned about safety issues relating to traffic.

Alderman Jacki Lokken said the council and city staff have been studying the issues for more than two years and have worked hard to address items like traffic congestion and other impacts.

"I don't think anybody wants any other retail stores to come into the city because of the competition. People need variety," she said.

She asked City Attorney Karen Christianson to explain to the council what legal aspects must be considered when taking action on an annexation application.

The council must make its decision based on the application's merits and whether the proposed land use matches the county's land use plan for the future, Christianson said. In this case, Wal-Mart complies with that plan. She added the council must also make a decision that couldn't be interpreted as being "arbitrary and capricious" based on the rationale used in making that decision.

Alderman Peter Erdman said tolerance is an issue.

"Everyone wants to be here, but when they get here they don't want anyone else to come," he said. "I've been involved in retail and I know that competition is a good thing in that industry."

Several alderpersons noted that the Wal-Mart project at build-out will provide the city with \$92,000 annually in property tax revenue. That would make it the largest commercial taxpayer in the city. That's about one-third of the total tax revenue that will be generated by the project, with other monies going to the school system, county and the town of Hartford via the city.

YOUR VIEWS

Why Wal-Mart isn't welcome here

There have been many articles written and many editorials sent in discussing if Wal-Mart is good or bad for Hartford. Some have argued that Wal-Mart is bad for small business. Some have argued that Wal-Mart's underpays their employees and does not give them adequate health care. Others are worried about the increased traffic and some about the environmental impact.

If you draw back from all of these arguments, you can hear these people care about Hartford. And why do they care about Hartford? Because they like it the way it is.

All of us choose to live here. I choose to live here.

And the reasons are simple.

It's a beautiful small town. There's a vibrant, friendly, community here. It's safe and one of the best places to raise children.

This is why I live in Hartford, because it's a small community.

With all the growth, such as the Wal-Mart, that our city government is allowing, it soon won't be a small town.

I ask all of you to think of "why do you live here?" If you live here for the same reasons I do, it certainly won't be the same long, as we'll be like West Bend or Menomonee Falls.

If I wanted to live in a town like those, I could just move there.

So, why do you live in Hartford? My guess is that it's the same reason I do. So, why does our city government want to allow it to grow bigger? **Either they're not in tune with their constituents or, worse, there is some conflict of interest.**

Keep Hartford small, keep Wal-Mart out.

**Jeff Szczerbinski
Hartford**