

Editorial: Going through the motions, again

Chico Enterprise-Record

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Our View: Wal-Mart's second try at getting the Chico City Council's OK for a supercenter begins tonight, and it's likely to just be more of the same.

The Chico City Council will take another look at the proposed Wal-Mart expansion in south Chico tonight.

Rather, they'll start to take another look. The way these things have been going, it'll take the council three meetings to reject the project one more time.

We fully expect rejection to happen, as Wal-Mart's response to the extortion attempt of several of the councilors the last go-round has been lukewarm.

Scott Gruendl's million bucks to swap out wood stoves? Nah. A solar array on the roof for Ann Schwab? Sorry, no. Hire anyone who loses their job because of the expansion? Are you kidding?

Instead the store will buy some air pollution credits to offset impacts, encourage carpooling by employees, donate to the Community Action Agency through the store's Feeding America Program, and kick in a bike for "Bike Week" each year.

It'll try to explain to locals how they can get their products placed at the store, and try to get local subcontractors involved in the construction if it's allowed to happen.

All in all, that's not likely to sway the councilors who piled on the conditions.

You can't really blame Wal-Mart for not going further, because none of the folks on the dais said such things actually would change their votes. They just suggested they might look more favorably on the proposal if the store gave them everything they wanted.

That's particularly the case since the store had already given more that expected of any other business construction project that's ever been conceived in this town. A comparison of the Wal-Mart and Costco expansions released by the Chico Economic Planning Corp. last week is telling — to a reasonable person — as it matches the 28 environmental features of the Wal-Mart proposal with the nine included in the Costco plan. That doesn't even count the wood stove fund, and the solar array, and the other oddball demands made of Wal-Mart but not Costco.

And as we know, Costco was approved, and Wal-Mart was not.

So no, you can't really expect Wal-Mart to stick its neck out too far, because it's pretty clear there's not likely to be any way to make a majority of the councilors happy.

The only real chance the store has is that the demands made at the last hearing were clearly recognized as extortion by a large segment of the community, and anger at that has been expressed pretty clearly over the past few weeks. Maybe the citizens' representatives will listen to the citizenry, and a couple of votes will change, clearing the way for the expansion.

But what we expect tonight is another strident public hearing, with the same people saying the same things that have already been said before the Planning Commission and the council, and adjournment to another meeting, or two. Eventually

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the council will again vote 5-2 to reject the expansion.

And then, three of those councilors will hope the voters' anger at their shenanigans will fade before they're up for re-election next November. We'll see.

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