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Editorial: Wal-Mart issue not going away

Chico Enterprise-Record

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Our view: As Wal-Mart works to build in Oroville and Paradise, it also hasn't abandoned the idea of expanding its store in Chico.

Ever since Wal-Mart's Chico expansion was rejected by the City Council last month, people have been wondering: What's next?

The answer seems to be: Nothing. For now.

Those who disagree with the council's decision have had several suggestions for the giant retailer. Sue the pants off the city. Start gathering signatures for a referendum. Find some land just outside the city limits and build in the county instead. Build on Indian land. Hurry up and build supercenters in Oroville and Paradise. Close down the Chico store and take all that tax money with you.

Angela Stoner, a public affairs manager for Wal-Mart based in San Francisco, was in Chico on Monday to thank the Chico Chamber of Commerce, the Chico Economic Planning Corp. and others for their support during the seven-year battle. When asked by the Enterprise-Record about the company's next move, Stoner was noncommittal.

Stoner said the company has heard the many suggestions. Filing a lawsuit, building in the county and closing the store are highly unlikely. Instead, Stoner said Wal-Mart would "continue to serve our Chico customers" the best it can.

Stoner thanked the store's supporters in the community and the "dedicated and knowledgeable" city staff members who worked on the expansion application. While calling the decision "a great disappointment," Stoner had no discouraging words about the four councilors who demanded more of Wal-Mart than any other business.

Terminally upbeat, the closest she came to criticism was bewilderment. "I don't think anyone ever thought a land-use decision for a lot-line readjustment would take seven years," she said.

Stoner called the support for Wal-Mart in the community "unbelievable" and said Wal-Mart wasn't giving up hope of expansion in Chico one day.

"I think you'll continue to hear from our supporters. I think you'll continue to hear from the business community. There are a number of people out there who want Chico to grow and prosper," Stoner said.

Wal-Mart won't discourage the displeasure. An advertisement in the Enterprise-Record on Monday thanked "over 14,000" residents who supported the expansion project and the "hundreds" who spoke at public hearings. The ad said "we share your disappointment" and assured the supporters: "There is no question your voice was heard."

It goes on to say: "We hope that based on your experience, you see the value of remaining active in the political process."

In a little less than a year, there's an election for three City Council seats. Just after the election, Wal-Mart will have waited the required year and can bring the expansion back to the council for reconsideration. In other words, expect the Wal-Mart decision, the council's attitude toward businesses and the city's declining sales tax

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