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Editorial: Vote still nutty the second time

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Our view: Let's hope those on the

losing end of council votes don't decide to bring every issue back for a reconsideration.

Larry Wahl just had to poke at the beehive with a stick. The town was buzzing with indignation over the Chico City Council's 4-3 decision to deny Wal-Mart's expansion of its current store. Wahl invited all the angry folks down to the Council Chambers on Tuesday to vent. They asked the council to reconsider. They never figured the council would actually do something as nonsensical as telling a business, no, you're big enough. Most of the people identified themselves as lower-income or fixed-income families that need all the bargains they can get just to survive.

The councilors listened for an hour — but nobody backed off their initial vote.

What did Wahl expect?

We don't like the precedent of holding hearings twice on every vote. We shudder to think that councilors on the losing end will start using Wahl's ploy and bringing back every issue at the next meeting, asking for a re-examination. We chastise the council enough for not being able to make decisions. Examining every vote twice would be most tiresome.

All the second hearing did was give four councilors another opportunity to spout their befuddling

rationales.

Tom Nickell, for example, said his vote was based on the fact that he went and talked to other grocers in town. Those grocers said if Wal-Mart became a grocery store, their business would be in trouble. They'd lay off people. Their stores would become boarded-up shells.

Well, what did Nickell expect them to say? Of course he's going to hear nothing but horror stories. Did Nickell go to, say, Mervyn's and Gottschalks and ask their managers whether he should approve Kohl's? Nope.

Then Andy Holcombe tried to convince the audience that he had to turn down Wal-Mart to prove that Chico was pro-business, which sounded like the doublespeak during the Vietnam War that "We had to destroy the village in order to save it."

Holcombe was trying to say that businesses will invest in Chico because they know they're protected from big bad Wal-Mart. Holcombe talks like a person who has never owned a business and had to take risks with his own money. Nobody is going to risk a significant amount of money going through the council-guided rigmarole, knowing the council can pull the rug out at the very end. Wal-Mart spent seven years and was billed more than \$635,000 by the city for studies and city staff time, plus whatever Wal-Mart spent on its own staff time and lawyers. Look where it got Wal-Mart.

Scott Gruendl asked how many people had read the entire environmental impact report, and when only three people raised their hands, he used that as a justification for voting against the project. He said he had read the whole thing. Doubtful. If you've read one EIR, you've read them all. You don't have to read all 400 pages of the boilerplate language, just

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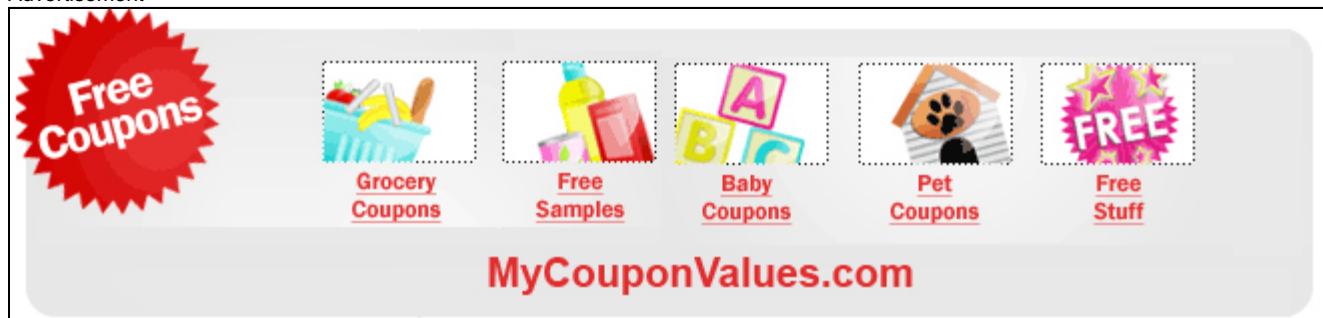
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a few paragraphs here and there that have salient points. Government wonks like Gruendl know what to read and what to avoid.

By bragging about his wonkish expertise, he sends a message to the uninformed peasants in the audience that he knows more than anybody. The fact is, he's just taking advantage of a government system that excludes the general public from the decision-making process by creating documents that are so obtuse that they are incomprehensible to normal people. It's nothing to crow about.

All of these excuses were the lame rationalizations of a council that turned a land-use issue into something entirely different. Four of them sent the message that, as business overlords, they get to decide which businesses thrive in Chico and which businesses don't.

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