

ChicoER.com

Wal-Mart decision put off a week: Public to speak at special meeting on Tuesday

By TONI SCOTT - Staff Writer

Posted: 09/16/2009 12:34:22 AM PDT

CHICO -- Despite seven years of heated discussions, hundreds of pages worth of documents and countless hours of public hearings, Chico will have to wait a bit longer before a decision is ultimately made on the proposed expansion of Wal-Mart.

The Chico City Council was set to hear public testimony on the proposed 82,500-foot expansion Tuesday night, with a standing-room-only crowd gathering to lend their opinions on the highly contentious project.

However, almost four hours into the meeting and following a 30-minute meeting extension, the hearing on the Planning Commission's Aug. 20 denial of the project's necessary environmental impact report had yet to be opened to public comment.

- [PHOTO GALLERY of the City Council meeting](#)

With 73 speakers wishing to be heard on the matter at 10:15 p.m., the council unanimously agreed to hold a special meeting at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday to allow citizens to express their concerns and commendations for the proposed expansion.

Although limited discussion was relayed from members of the public, the council was able to hear

from city staff — who have consistently recommended the expansion — Wal-Mart officials and members of Chico Advocates For A Responsible Economy (CARE).

City Senior Planner Zach Thomas maintained Tuesday that although the EIR was denied certification by the Planning Commission, the document does adequately address and mitigate environmental impacts the proposed project could create.

Thomas said although the commission had specific concerns about the traffic and air quality studies, which were deemed by the EIR to be "significant and unavoidable," several measures have been taken to lessen the project's impact on those factors.

"Just because they are significant and unavoidable, doesn't mean they are not mitigated," Thomas said. "In fact, they have been fully mitigated, but the impact still exists."

Thomas said those impacts, which includes an eight-second delay at a single traffic light and the Highway 99 southbound on-ramp at East 20th Street, would be consistent regardless of the type of retail development that would occur in the area. The area is zoned for commercial use.

"The impact will always be there, no matter what you do," Thomas said.

In addition to Thomas' report on traffic, a letter from the Butte County Air Quality District submitted to the council also stated support for Wal-Mart's efforts toward mitigating impacts on air quality, deeming their efforts acceptable.

"The district has reviewed the air quality management and mitigation measures proposed by Wal-Mart and has determined they are consistent

Advertisement



UNIVERSITY of SAN FRANCISCO

End-to-End Training as It Should Be: 100% ONLINE!

Earn Your Master Certificate in Internet Marketing

→ SEO & Paid Search	→ Internet Law
→ Online Branding	→ Media Buying
→ Web Analytics	→ Social Media

➔

1-800-268-9943

USanFranOnline.com/FD

Print Powered By 

ChicoER.com

with the recommended best available mitigation measures in the district's CEQA Handbook," the letter, written by Gail Williams, senior air quality planner, states.

Aside from the EIR report, a significant portion of the discussion Tuesday was dominated by concerns about competitive wages, insurance and charitable giving, with several City Council members and Heather Schlaff of CARE questioning the business practices of the corporation and the contribution of the project to urban blight.

As proponents of the expansion donned buttons saying "Jobs," Schlaff said the overall economic impact of the expansion to Chico would be detrimental, adding the expansion could take business away from current retailers and actually promote job loss.

"If this expansion is denied Chico loses nothing," Schlaff said. "Consumers will continue to have the choice of shopping at the remodeled Wal-Mart. If it is approved, nothing is gained. A fourth discount grocery store in an impacted area is unnecessary, irresponsible growth."

But Wal-Mart spokeswoman Angela Stoner, who addressed a plethora of concerns from council members, maintained the store's expansion would create 150 local jobs, while increasing sales tax revenue and providing residents with low-cost goods in a time when they may need them most.

"Every day our customers depend on us to save money," Stoner said.

Ultimately, however, the decision before the council is to consider the validity of the project's EIR, a matter that will be further discussed at Tuesday's special meeting.

Mayor Ann Schwab said the meeting will open with public comment and advised the only speakers who will be recognized are those who submitted speaker cards Tuesday.

In other action Tuesday night, the City Council confirmed Mike Maloney as police chief, following City Manager's Dave Burkland's recent announcement of Maloney as the top choice for the position previously held by Bruce Hagerty.

Prior to Maloney's unanimous confirmation, Schwab stated her support for the 24-year veteran of the Chico Police Department.

"I feel that the city is in exceptional hands with Chief Maloney at the helm," Schwab said.

Staff Writer Toni Scott can be reached at 896-7767 or tscott@chicoer.com.

Advertisement




Florida Tech
UNIVERSITY ONLINE

**Bring the Classroom to Your Home
With a Degree Online From Florida Tech**

 **APPLY TODAY!**
FloridaTechOnline.com/FD | 1-888-253-5946

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™