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## **WAL-MART DROPS HADLEY SUPERCENTER PLANS; DEVELOPER VOWS TO FIND NEW TENANTS**

Wal-Mart has dropped its plans to build a supercenter in Hadley, Massachusetts. The company's decision ends three years of efforts to build a 212,000-square foot store at the Hampshire Mall.

Representatives for the Pyramid Companies, which is developing the site on which the supercenter was to be built, have notified residents and local officials that Wal-Mart is no longer a prospective tenant. However, Pyramid says it will continue to develop the site and seek new tenants to take Wal-Mart's place. Wal-Mart continues to operate a regular-sized discount store at the Mountain Farms Mall less than 300 yards away.

Wal-Mart's decision to abandon the supercenter plan means that a smaller scale development could be built that protects the nearby Norwottuck Rail Trail and surrounding wetlands. The supercenter would have been the largest single structure in Hadley, with loading docks within 250-300 feet of the Rail Trail.

In 2007, Wal-Mart announced it was cutting back by about one-third the number of some 270 new supercenter openings nationwide this year. Pyramid representatives said the current economic downturn was a factor in Wal-Mart's decision, as well as the fact that the Hadley location had become a "difficult" site on which to build a supercenter.

Wal-Mart and its developer first filed plans to build the supercenter and 13-acre parking lot in March 2005. As planned, the supercenter would have wiped out several acres of wetlands. In November 2005, Hadley residents presented a 91-page report that detailed the wetlands impacts that Wal-Mart refused to admit. In early 2006, the Hadley Conservation Commission and Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection ruled that indeed Wal-Mart had not reported all the wetlands and required that new plans be filed if the project was to move ahead. However, for the past two years, the developer has refused to produce plans that comply with wetlands laws and has instead continued to



appeal these rulings through the state Division of Administrative Law Appeals process. These appeals remain active and a ruling is expected in the coming weeks.

In April 2007, Wal-Mart's environmental impact report was rejected by the Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs for failing to show all wetlands and stormwater impacts, as well as for failing to provide adequate traffic management. The rejection came after some 380 area residents, agency officials and business owners wrote comments to the state expressing concerns about the supercenter project. But in May 2007, Wal-Mart held an "open house" at the Hadley American Legion Hall to assure residents and local officials that the supercenter would be built.

The new store would have drawn more than 6,500 new vehicle trips per day, adding to the 22,000 trips already on Route 9. The supercenter would have increased traffic nearly five-fold where the Rail Trail crosses South Maple Street. The Planning Board and Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation asked for a bridge or tunnel crossing to protect bicyclists and pedestrians, but Wal-Mart would only agree to a yellow flashing light.

The supercenter would have been the third major "big box" project in Hadley in recent years. Construction is under way on a 230,000-square foot mall at Route 9 and North Maple Street that will include a Home Depot and five other stores; and the state recently approved a 180,000-square foot development for a Lowe's home improvement store at the Long Hollow Bison Farm one-half mile to the west near Mill Valley Road.

Many residents were frustrated that Wal-Mart refused to discuss compensation for the loss of more than 20 acres of farmland. In contrast, residents negotiated an agreement with the developer of the Lowe's store to pay the Town of Hadley \$410,000 to mitigate the loss of 13 acres farmland. Similarly, the Home Depot project includes approximately \$125,000 in payments to help protect some 60 acres of Hadley farmland.

It is not clear how large another store on the site could be. In May 2006, Hadley Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly to restrict the size of future retail stores in town to 75,000 square feet or less. Wal-Mart's developer, Pyramid, filed subdivision plans just prior to that vote to lock in a temporary "grandfathering" exemption from the retail size-limit for most of the site, but the subdivision approval process for the entire site is not yet complete.



Members of Hadley Neighbors have asked the Planning Board to deny the subdivision because it violates several zoning and subdivision regulations and the Board is therefore under no obligation to grant the variances necessary for approval. By not voting on the pending application, the Planning Board is unnecessarily extending Pyramid's ability to evade the 75,000-square foot retail store size limit. The size limit was enacted as one of the first steps in Hadley's new Master Plan, adopted unanimously by Town Meeting in October 2005.

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