

Sincere Seven ♦ *"Fighting For Justice & Equality In Our Workplace"*



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"Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." _____ Gal. 6:9

Date: November 13, 2013

To: Board of Zoning Adjustment

Re: **Perry Redd's Testimony Before BZA**

Good Day Honorable Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment...my name is Perry Redd, member and volunteer Director of Sincere Seven, a 12-year old 501(c) (3) organization dedicated to the working class—including the working class residents who live near and around the Walmart facility located at Georgia & Missouri Avenues, NW.

On behalf of Sincere Seven, I offer testimony regarding Subtitle G as part of the comprehensive Zoning Code rewrite.

I've come to petition the Board to mandate that developers of big-box stores secure a special exception from the BZA before they may proceed with their developments. This policy is necessary since most commercial zones are as-of-right, which entitles developers to build any retail they want regardless of impact on adjacent community residents, small businesses, traffic, and neighborhood character. I spoke passionately on this during my run for the At-Large Council seat in the spring.

This Walmart development project is, has been and will have a negative impact on the area it sits. Many residents and the businesses adjacent to the site will be negatively impacted just as its been documented in several business and academic journals. Depending on the type of business, the per-mile closure rate increases for drugstores is almost 20 percent. For home furnishings, it's about 15 percent. For hardware stores, it's about 18 percent per mile. For toys, it's more than 25 percent per mile.¹

The research also shows that during the study period, from 2006 to 2008, overall sales tax revenues went down in the two ZIP codes closest to or encompassing the Walmart. Before the store opened, the sales tax revenues for these two ZIP codes were growing at rates of 6.7 percent and 4.3 percent per year. After the Walmart opened, they each saw a boost – up to nearly 18 percent in the ZIP containing the Walmart and slightly up to about 5 percent in the ZIP next door.

But by 2008, both of those growth bumps had faded, and the ZIPs were seeing declines – negative 11 percent sales tax revenue growth in the ZIP containing the Walmart and negative 3 percent in the neighboring ZIP. Researchers argue that by 2008, the amount of jobs lost because of store closures was just about the same as those created by the Walmart store's opening. I don't believe you haven't heard any of this before. It's still relevant.

The impact on traffic is terrible. With the children who have to cross Georgia at the Missouri intersection, it's like watching a reality TV episode of Wipeout. The kids—mostly middle

¹ University of Illinois Chicago economics professor Joe Persky, one of the authors of the study, which was published in *Economic Development Quarterly*.

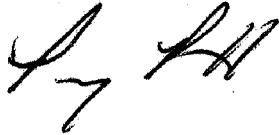
schoolers—have their head on a swivel, then make their mad dash across the zig-zag, multi-light intersection that will dangerously be dramatically increased when those doors open on December 5th.

The traffic pattern hasn't gotten any better since the structure has gone up. Traveling west from Missouri Avenue to the Military Road side has been made ever more inconvenient by the island extension that prevents left turns onto Colorado. I know, some engineer thought this was a great idea to keep traffic flowing westward, right? Well, guess what? Now, one has to drive another quarter mile to make a left turn to go south, because you can't make a left turn at 13th Street either! All because this stuff wasn't remedied prior to the zoning approval proceeded.

In our city, we've had battles over new development that clashes with the character of the neighborhood. When I was young, boxy, square and shiny was cool, but after years of wisdom set in, I grew to appreciate the architecture of days gone by. Preservation gained meaning and thus, I don't see where Walmart even considered "fitting in" to the current nature of the existing corridor. Sure, Walmart developers could've participated in the proposed plan to execute a façade project, but of course, they didn't have to secure a special exception, so the conversation rolled on, and we've got an huge out-of-character retailer.

I could talk about my pet reason for opposing the development—low wages—but that's a different hearing for a different board. Thank you for allowing me a minute to testify in support of a mandate that developers of big-box stores secure a special exception *before* developing.

Sincerely,



Perry Redd