Written by Mark Jaeger
Wednesday, 12 May 2010 17:29

Saukville officials see advantage to Walmart staying at present site

Three years ago, when Walmart's plan to build a Supercenter retail outlet on the north end of the sprawling Heritage Crossings development came to light, Village of Saukville officials were concerned with what would be left behind.

The revamped plan the retailer has formulated — expanding its current store on East Green Bay Avenue instead of building a free-standing store on a 40-acre parcel on the west side of Northwoods Road — have eliminated those concerns.

Store officials told the Village of Saukville Plan Commission last week they hope to add 25,050 square feet of retail space to their current building. The expanded building would be just over 121,000 square feet.

The project means the store has dropped plans for a new Supercenter, which was expected to be more than 184,000 square feet. That plan would have made the Saukville store the largest big-box retail outlet in Ozaukee County, dwarfing the sprawling 151,000-square-foot Costco store that opened in Grafton in 2007.

The prospect of such a large store coming to Saukville touched off a firestorm of public reaction, with many comments from people concerned that the new store would mean the demise of smaller local shops.

Village officials largely ignored the anti-Walmart backlash three years ago, but quickly adopted an ordinance requiring the owners of buildings larger than 50,000 square feet to include detailed re-use plans as part of any new site plan.

When Walmart attorney Deborah Tomczyk talked to the Plan Commission about the proposed expansion, she said one of the most appealing aspects of building onto the current store is not having to worry about finding a new occupant for the property.

Village President Barb Dickmann said local officials were equally pleased that the plan saves the village from having to address the vacant building.

“The village does have a reuse ordinance in place so the remodel to Walmart is the best answer for their proposed growth,” Dickmann said.

“I believe this is really the best answer for Walmart’s proposed growth because they have the building already. It is in a terrific location for them.”

Tomczyk said store officials have also been in contact with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and are not bothered by plans to add a roundabout at the Highway 33 intersection with Market Street, the primary entryway to the store.

“Quite a few of our stores have roundabouts,” Tomczyk said.

She said Walmart is also interested in working with the village to create a Planned Unit development agreement that might grant some flexibility within the Highway 33 corridor.

Community Development Director Brian Biernat said the revamped Walmart could become part of an overlay district for the commercial corridor.

“The goal would be to better manage the type of development we’d like to see,” Biernat said.

Dickmann said Walmart officials have said the redesign will be treated like a new build by the company, promising various site improvements.

“What we are seeing far exceeds what is there now. We will hold them to those promises,” she told the commission.

SAUKVILLE’S WALMART is due for an expansion and makeover, according to plans presented to the Village of Saukville Plan Commission last week. Photo by Sam Arendt