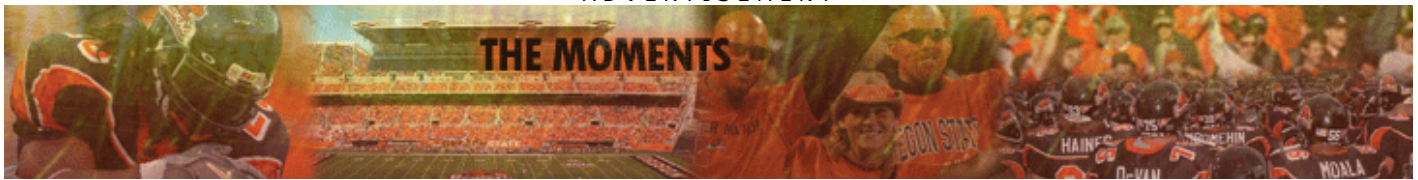


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Neighbors protest big box development in Madison South

BY ERIC HENDRICKSEN ✉

The East County News, Mar 9, 2007, Updated Mar 9, 2007

The vacant parcel of land across from Madison High School on Northeast 82nd Avenue has never been a highlight of the neighborhood, but in recent months, the site has become the focal point for an increasingly common struggle going on between local communities and large-scale developers.

Once a gravel pit, the Madison South neighborhood lot has been used as a garbage dump and a golf driving range throughout the years, never in a rendition particularly pleasing to area residents. The land stood vacant for five years, but in 2005, Canadian-based developer SmartCentres began expressing interest.

SmartCentres is a major retail space developer, and touts a significant relationship with Wal-Mart, which has drawn opposition from communities in Portland and nationwide based on a perception of unfair business and labor practices. According to the SmartCentres website, the majority of its retail centers are “anchored by a Wal-Mart store.”



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In February, community members protested the rezoning and development of a site in the Madison South neighborhood, which could become Portland's next Wal-Mart.

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In 2006, the development company filed a formal application to rezone and develop 240,000 square feet of retail space at the site, up from the 60,000 square feet of commercial space for which the spot was originally zoned. Smart Centres did not respond to calls made by East County News.

While the company's relationship with Wal-Mart may have helped provoke a not-in-my-backyard response to SmartCentres among Madison South residents, according to Frank Walsh, co-chair of the group Save Madison South – organized to fight the proposed development – neighbors are most concerned about the rezoning effort.

“It’s an issue of plain neighborhood livability,” Walsh said. “We’re opposed to this [development] based on its proposed size.”

Walsh cites a litany of concerns, such as loss of property values, light pollution, late-night delivery noise, traffic congestion and safety (Madison High, Gregory Heights Middle and Jason Lee Elementary schools are all located within a few blocks of the proposed development).

Since November 2006, members of the group have been working to mobilize the community against the development, going door-to-door, conducting telephone polls and organizing a protest that took place Saturday, Feb. 17.

Deadline for the completion of SmartCentres’ formal application, which was delayed because of traffic and water runoff issues, was Tuesday, Feb. 13.

The Portland City Planner has put the application on hold, where it will remain throughout early March. Whether or not the city grants the application, either the Save Madison South group or SmartCentres is likely to appeal the decision. In that event, the city planner will set a date for a hearing, where both the developer and community will have an opportunity to make testimony.

For more information and ongoing developments, and for ways to get involved, visit www.savemadisonsouth.org.

