

Big box store developers, neighbors meet

Big boxers, neighbors meet

Representatives of the Madison South and Roseway neighborhood associations met last month with their counterparts from the SmartCentres Corporation of Canada. The latter has been trying to create a big box retail project on a 26-acre former landfill on Northeast 82nd Avenue at Siskiyou Street, across from Madison High School. The neighborhood groups have opposed the project as unsuitable for the site and detrimental to the community in several ways. Two months ago SmartCentres withdrew its development application and canceled a scheduled public hearing, apparently in response to the widespread opposition and critical city staff evaluations.

According to reports, at the meeting Madison South board member Frank Walsh told the SmartCentres people, "Should SmartCentres with the land at 82nd and Siskiyou be available, we need to see a plan that is radically different from the original application. And if this is not something that is a possibility from SmartCentres' perspective, then we respectfully ask them to walk away from this development and pursue other, more appropriate locations."

Flavio Volpe, SmartCentres communications director, indicated to the Memo that the course the neighborhood asked for might not be out of the question. "We are looking at all options in the built form, and uses other than retail," he said in a phone interview. What they did not propose to do is disappear: "We fully intend to make a proposal to build something on that site."

Walsh reported that he asked why SmartCentres had chosen Portland for its first U.S. development venture. (It has 185 shopping centers in Canada.) According to Madison South, SmartCentres' Andrew Sinclair responded, "Why not?"

Volpe gave the Memo a slightly more cogent response: "Portland is vibrant and well-informed. It's a great place to launch our U.S. business venture." He added, "We understand that every municipality has different needs." ■