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Last Monday night, April 23, Quad Cities Interfaith hosted a remarkable documentary film, produced by Micha Peled, on the impact of Wal-Mart stores in communities. Only three Davenport aldermen bothered to show up: Aldermen Hean, Sherwood, and Englemann. The controversial development is proposed to occur in Alderman McGivern's 6th Ward, and our newly elected Alderman-at-Large Steve Ahrens (who demonstrated a significant lack of knowledge relative to this issue during our interview just days before the election) neglected to attend, and their absence was glaring.

Alderman Hean, 5th Ward, is the only voice of reason on the entire council at this present moment. He has continued to ask questions (see below), only to have a self-proclaimed Harvard Graduate as expert economic spokesperson on behalf of THF Realty tell him there are no answers, at least as far as being able to produce an economic impact study on Super Wal-Mart development. Gong! Wrong answer Mr. Harvard graduate. In fact, Professor Ken Stone, Iowa State University's Department of Economic Development, begs to differ. "It may be more difficult to identify the economic impact in a larger metropolitan area, but it is entirely possible. Iowa is analogous to a net sum gain because of the lack of population growth, so if Super Wal-Mart realized revenues of $100 million, those dollars did not appear out of thin air. They had to come from somewhere-that somewhere is other merchant's cash registers." Professor Stone also explained that in the case of an expansion such as the one proposed here in Davenport, "It is primarily in the area of groceries, so that is where you can expect to see an immediate impact. Smaller industries, such as opticians and auto lube services, will notice impact, but not as dramatic. There are many anecdotal examples showing as much as a 25% reduction in revenues for area groceries in the first year when a Super Wal-Mart Center expands into a market. These existing situations can be studied and applied to your market with proper adjustments. It is nonsense to say that an economic impact study for one store can't be done."

Professor Stone also pointed out that city councils tend to support these developments because they narrowly believe that such projects increase the tax base. "Unfortunately, no one is looking out for the existing merchants," he sadly pointed out. Many established businesses are hurt, some more than others, but the total net result can offset much if not most of the gain that might be realized with the new development. An economic impact study is essential to determine whether a benefit actually exists.

Nine of the ten Davenport aldermen have so far voted to approve the project by passing the two rezoning requests by THF Realty necessary to move the project forward. The council is also considering granting two Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement Districts (SSMIDs) that will line the developer's pockets with additional taxes they will recoup from their tenants. All this represents four actions to be voted on at next Wednesday's regular council meeting. Unless citizens make their objections known to their aldermen, these actions will go forward and area businesses will be hurt, not to mention the increased traffic congestion we can expect. Since this council is not interested in looking out for existing merchants, then we must. There are countless examples of just such outcomes all over the nations. Visit www.sprawl-busters.com to see for yourself. Hold these aldermen accountable to the promises they made during their campaigns.

It is important to note that none of the publicly declared promises made by THF about improvements, landscaping, etc. are in any kind of completed formal written agreement. THF has a history of unwillingness to perform their contractual obligations to the city, evidenced by the Davies improvements not being completed. Why should we trust them to keep their verbal promises? This whole situation becomes increasingly risky and more foolish for Davenport. None of the required development agreements are completed, the parameters of the proposed SSMIDs are woefully inadequate in their specificity, and there will be no accountability if we don't get one hell of a lot more savvy before we move forward. Alderman Hean doesn't have all the answers, but at least he is asking the questions and voting against the project based on the serious lack of solid information with which any single one of these aldermen should move forward in good conscience. Every time these nine aldermen vote in favor of these actions, they sell us out a little more. Insist that our elected officials slow down and get the information necessary to make decisions they can justify in good faith, and that the community can satisfactorily live with.

Here a just a few of the more critical concerns being voiced by Aldermen Hean regarding Wal-Mart and SSMIDs that have yet to be resolved, even though the final vote is next Wednesday evening, May 2nd, at the regular council meeting:

- no formal written agreement for new traffic improvements proposed by THF;
- no formal written agreement for landscaping promised by THF;
- no agreement with Sam's Club not to go dark;
- no resolution or formal agreement about City purchasing dark Wal-Mart store;
- no schedule for proposed improvements formalized;
- no Merit and Feasibility Study from the Plan & Zoning Commission as required by law;
- no report from the Comprehensive Planning Committee as requested;
- no net economic impact study as requested;

- no marketing plan from THF Realty as requested;
- no accurate sales tax information;
- no governing body established for SSMIDs;
- no formalized development agreement for SSMIDs;
- no build-out schedule for SSMIDs;
- no disbursement schedule for SSMIDs;
- no oversight of SSMID established;
- SSMID petition to vague and broad-based; and
- no resolution about the violation of the due process of SSMIDs.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

During the month of April, Family Resources has been actively trying to raise the public's awareness of the prevalence of rape and sexual assault in our community through an aggressive ad campaign. While promoting sexual assault awareness, Family Resources also hopes to inform citizens about their services and ability to help victims of sexual assault. Sexual Assault is often accompanied by domestic violence, also an area of expertise for Family Resources.

According to the US Department of Justice, one out of every three American girls is sexually assaulted by the age of 18. For boys, it is one out of every six. Aggregately, 1.3 women are sexually assaulted every minute in the US, according to statistics from the Quad Cities/Sexual Assault Counseling and Advocacy Program. "We know that only one out of eight rapes is ever reported to the police," said Roxanne Zamora, the program's supervisor. "While we are concerned that the rapist is caught and punished, our greatest concern is that the victim gets the help and treatment he/she needs."

Last year, the sexual assault advocacy program served 308 victims. In 1999, 149 "forcible sex offenses" occurred in Davenport alone, according to the Davenport Police Department's Uniform Crime Reporting Analysis. Of the 149 offenses, 99 were forcible rape. The analysis also reported an additional 17 nonforcible sexual offenses.

Apply the national statistics to our own community and the problem becomes extremely significant.

As part of the awareness campaign, Family Resources is distributing thousands of self-adhesive notes throughout the community, but especially in women's restrooms. The idea is that the information will be more effective if presented during a time of privacy, rather than on

a bulletin board. The goal is to help victims understand that sexual assault is not their fault, and to help them come to terms with the fact that they are not to blame.

For those interested in finding out more about the sexual assault advocacy program, call 309-793-7729 or the 24-hour crisis line at 563-326-9191 in Iowa, or 309-797-1777 in Illinois. Also, a “Take Back the Night” rally will be held at Blackhawk College’s cafeteria in Building 4, from 6-8pm, Wednesday, April 25.