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## Why Environmentalists Oppose the Wal-Mart Super Center

by Martin J. Bennett

Sonoma County is one of the most environmentally conscious places in California. Through conservation of open space, protection of the coast, organic farming, investments in rail transit, clean power, smart growth policies and aGoLocal cooperative, residents have tried to preserve natural beauty, reduce greenhouse gasses, and create a sustainable economy. However, the proposed expansion of the Wal-Mart discount store in Rohnert Park to become a supercenter selling both general merchandise and groceries undermines these efforts.

The Rohnert Park City Council approved the proposed expansion in 2010 but a Superior Court judge ruled in favor of the Sierra Club and Sonoma County Conservation Action in a suit claiming the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was flawed. Wal-Mart has now submitted a revised EIR that the City Council will soon consider (details below).

A supercenter will increase dependency on the automobile and increase traffic in an already congested 101 corridor; the supercenter operations and its supply chain will increase greenhouse gas emissions and reduce air quality in the region; and Wal-Mart campaign contributions will support candidates opposed to environmental protection.

A recent report by the Institute of Local Self Reliance, "Walmart's Assault on the Climate," cites Wal-Mart's own documents to show that its total carbon emissions since 2005 have increased by 14 percent and reached 21 million metric tons in 2013. According to the report, Wal-Mart is one of the largest climate polluters in the nation; the company lags behind its peers in shifting to clean energy; and Wal-Mart admits that their greenhouse gas emissions will climb over the next decade. Why?

First, only 4 percent of the electricity for Wal-Mart store operations is derived from clean energy sources such as wind and solar. Wal-Mart lags far behind other large retailers in making the shift to renewable energy. Staples and Kohl's, for instance, get all of their electricity for store operations from renewable sources.

Second, the Wal-Mart big-box retail model is based upon customer transportation by auto and paving over open space to construct huge stores with large parking lots on

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the urban periphery. In addition, Wal-Mart's growing monopoly in the retail sector has forced tens of thousands of downtown and neighborhood hardware, grocery, and apparel stores to close.

Hence, shoppers have fewer choices and must drive longer distances. Since the nationwide expansion of Wal-Mart in the late 1980s from a regional chain to the nation's largest retailer, the number of miles the average household is driving to shop has increased by 42 percent.

According to the Sonoma County Community Climate Action Plan, 62 percent of Sonoma County's greenhouse gas emissions come from the transportation sector.

Wal-Mart has built more than 3200 supercenters that average 180,000 square feet and require up to twenty acres. According to the Institute for Traffic Engineers, supercenters attract customers from regional markets who drive longer distances to shop. There are no supercenters in Sonoma, Marin, Lake, and Mendocino counties; and a supercenter, located on the 101 corridor will certainly contribute to increased traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

Wal-Mart's calculation of its greenhouse gas emissions significantly underestimates the retailer's carbon footprint and the company does not account for several major sources of pollution. Wal-Mart's global supply chain is dependent on shipping products from offshore factories in Asia by supersized container ships that are a leading source of greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, between 2005-2012 Wal-Mart constructed 200 million square feet of new store space that

required clearing vast tracts of CO<sub>2</sub> absorbing forests and fields.

A super center will undermine local agriculture, too. In just two decades Wal-Mart has captured 25 percent of the national grocery market, reduced the small farmer's share of the food dollar and fostered a greater concentration of meat packers, dairies and food processors. Wal-Mart relies on distant factory farms for its meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables. Sonoma County suppliers of agricultural products are cut out of the Wal-Mart supply chain.

Wal-Mart claims it is becoming a more environmentally friendly company. However, the ISLR report reveals that Wal-Mart's Political Action Committee is one of the largest donors to Congressional candidates and a major contributor to climate change deniers, to lawmakers who vote for oil company subsidies, to those who voted against EPA regulations of greenhouse gasses, and to those who support the Keystone XL pipeline. Between 2005 and 2012 more than half of the campaign contributions by Wal-Mart and the Walton family were made to members of Congress who received lifetime voting scores under 30 percent from the League of Conservation Voters – in other words, they voted against the environment 70 percent of the time.

All who are concerned about our environment, the climate crisis, and local agriculture must just join together to oppose the super center.

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This article first appeared in the Sierra Club Needles August-September issue.

The Rohnert Park City Council will consider the revised EIR for the Wal-Mart super center in late September or early October. Please goto

<http://northbayjobswithjustice.org> for more information or call: 707-346-1187