

Rohnert Park Community Voice
Letters to the Voice
Friday, August 29, 2014

Dear Community Voice Editor:

There was a major defeat for Democracy in Rohnert Park last Thursday night (14 August) at the Planning Commission hearing.

1) An article in the Press Democrat that morning announced that one Planning Commissioner (Susan Adams) and one City Councilmember (Mayor Joe Callinan) had already made up their minds to support Walmart. So what was the point of a Public Hearing?! (In fact one could ask the Mayor why there should even be a Planning Commission vote, since he didn't even wait to hear what the Commissioners said.) Commissioner Adams was requested to recuse herself due to bias that would irredeemably taint the proceedings; she not only declined but actually made the motions to act.

2) Planning Commission Chair Gerard Giudice arbitrarily, capriciously, indefensibly, and without explanation cut down speaking times from the traditional 3 minutes to 2, and refused to allow speakers to trade times as is also traditional. When I tried to discuss these actions with him at a break he threatened to have the Police remove me from the building! So much for our First Amendment right to "petition for redress of grievances".

3) The speakers were 25 to 10 against Walmart (and 8 of the 10 pro-Walmart speakers were Walmart employees whose testimony was entirely anecdotal), but the Planning Commission voted for the Walmart expansion anyway.

4) No regard was given to a host of valid objections, including inconsistency with the City's General Plan, and the opening of a new Walmart neighborhood grocery in Mountain Shadows, among many others.

Moreover, the Press Democrat article had some astonishing statements by Adams and Callinan. Adams charged out-of-city groups with inconsistency in attacking Rohnert Park but not other nearby cities, which is totally contrary to reality. And Callinan evidently doesn't understand Walmart's business model, which he applauded and suggested should be adopted by governments. Walmart's low prices are achieved by unloading a lot of costs of doing business to taxpayers. They pay their employees such low wages that many qualify for government-supported

programs such as food stamps, WIC, TANF, child care, health insurance, and the earned-income tax credit. How exactly would that work if government tried it? Would

it subsidize itself?!

Some Commissioners have allowed themselves to be put into a little glass box where the only issue is whether every "i" has been dotted and every "t" crossed on the EIR. They don't see the bigger picture: that the proper role of the Planning Commission is to determine what is best for the City.

Commissioner Adams said, "We have a municipal code. We don't have a choice but to follow that." Wrong: She should have said "we have a GENERAL PLAN. We don't have a choice but to follow that." And vote NO.

Chair Giudice said, "Legally, I think Walmart has a right to expand." Wrong again: Walmart has no unfettered right to expand -- if it did, no permit would be required. Some Planning Commissioners are totally out-to-lunch about the function of the petitioning process. If the Commission could never say NO, there would be no need for it.

Only Commissioner Susan Haydon didn't fall for the rhetoric of others which suggested that the permitting process is just a pro-forma series of useless hoops to make businesses jump through. There are many things one (citizen or business) can do without a permit.

But the whole point of a permit is that it might be necessary from time to time to say "No, your proposal is not good for civil society as a whole." I regret that there are not more voices of sanity like Commissioner Haydon running our City government!

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