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News Story No. 3: Walmart eyes Patterson

by James Leonard | Patterson Irrigator
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[view slideshow \(4 images\)](#) It's not often that a retail company turning in an application to open a store becomes

major news. Then again, there aren't many retailers as controversial as Walmart.

The giant of the industry made waves in Patterson almost immediately in 2009, submitting an application to the city in January along with plans that called for a 158,000-square-foot store at the southwest corner of Sperry and Ward avenues.

Its sheer size generated shock: The Save Mart Supermarkets store on the other side of Sperry is less than a third of that size, at 49,000 square feet. Walmart's grocery section alone would be around 33,000 square feet.

Along with Walmart's application arrived an extensive public outreach campaign that included print and Web advertising and an entire Web site devoted to those who support the idea of a Patterson Walmart.

The store quickly became the hot-button issue of the year in Patterson. Many hated the idea, and many loved it — but everyone seemed to have a strong opinion one way or the other. No story consistently generated more letters to the editor or Web comments here than Walmart.

Those in favor repeatedly pointed to a lack of shopping choices in town and a lack of competition in the grocery business. They pointed to the sales tax revenue the city loses by sending its residents to Modesto, Turlock and Tracy to do their shopping. Walmart, they said, would mean convenience and competitive pricing for Patterson's residents and more tax dollars for city coffers — the ultimate win-win.

Those against Walmart, who formed an opposition group shortly after news broke of the retailer's application, think the store represents an extreme danger to the small-town way of life longtime Patterson residents have come to expect. The benefits of Walmart, they claimed, could not outweigh the immense harm the store would cause in terms of traffic and the overall quality of life in Patterson. They say the store will be a major blow to grocery stores like Save Mart and will squash mom-and-pop businesses of all sorts.

The controversy over Walmart continued throughout much of the year, as the application was deemed complete and work began on an environmental review.

That review — which will examine specific concerns raised by local residents and groups during a 30-day comment period in October — should be up for public review sometime in 2010. The project must then get approval from the Patterson Planning Commission and City Council before construction can begin.

It's unclear how this story will end, but if 2009 was any indication, there will be no shortage of opinions to go around each and every time Walmart returns to the public forum.

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