

WAL-MART

Consultant report casts doubt on store's plan

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TEMPERANCE — A consultant hired by Wal-Mart to guide the retailing behemoth through Bedford Township's maze of zoning and planning regulations said that the store plan is incompatible with the land.

The analysis, which concludes that the planned 150,000-square-foot store would be too close to adjacent neighborhoods and too big to fit within zoning restrictions, casts doubt on whether the project in Toledo's largest suburb will proceed at all. But it also has elated neighbors who have spent more than a year fighting a project that has yet to beformally proposed.

"I'm very pleased [with the analysis]," said Judy Frankowski, a spokesperson for BedfordWatch.com, the ad-hoc neighborhood organization established a year ago to fight the Wal-Mart project at Lewis Avenue and West Sterns Road. "To me, it laid out the obvious reasons for not having a big box store for that location. Kudos to our boards and commissions for having the foresight to put those regulations in place."

In December, Wal-Mart hired Wade-Trim, of Taylor, Mich., to review its plans to build a 150,000-square-foot dry goods store west of Whitman Ford to see how those plans would mesh with zoning and development ordinances.

Wade-Trim is the consultant the township has used for years, including through the development last year of its master plan and controversial architecture, lighting, and landscaping ordinances.

In a letter last month to a Dayton engineering firm working on the project, Wade-Trim planner Julie Johnston said that her review of Wal-Mart's plans indicated that they were incompatible with the property.

"With the review of the components of the master plan as well as the location of the site adjacent to residential property, it is difficult to support a rezoning at this location," Ms. Johnston wrote, adding that "a large-scale retail use like Wal-Mart would impact the residential character of the area."

Township officials declined comment on the letter because a formal application was never submitted on the project.

Ms. Johnston said her review indicated that "the township master plan does not support the development of a large-scale single store retail use." Even if

Wal-Mart opted to proceed and could win approval for rezoning, the project still would require too many variances to proceed.

"In conclusion, there are many obstacles to the development of a Wal-Mart store at this location," Ms. Johnston wrote. "The rezoning cannot be supported by the master plan and is incompatible with adjacent residential uses.

"With these impediments in place, it is unlikely that we could recommend approval of the rezoning to the Planning

Commission or the necessary variances to the Board of Appeals," she concluded.

Wal-Mart regional spokesman John Bisio did not return several phone calls seeking comment. However, Jon Whitman, owner of Whitman Ford and the person who has optioned the land to Wal-Mart, called the letter "disappointing and disingenuous."

"It's a very disappointing and deceptive letter for our family and for Wal-Mart, and I don't know how you get around that," Mr. Whitman said. He said that Wal-Mart officials were willing to build a store similar to one they operate in Canton Township, Mich., upon which many of Bedford Township's zoning

ordinances are based.

"I don't know what to say after we've heard over and over again that Canton Township is the ideal thing and then we find out that they won't approve a store like the one in Canton Township," Mr. Whitman said.

Mr. Whitman said the idea expressed in the township's newly enacted master plan that recognizes Toledo as its commercial center hurts local businesses and impedes legitimate development.

"I don't understand why the legitimate needs of our community can't be met within our own community. Why don't we adopt the Toledo school system as ours as well? Why stop at just commercial, if this is the case,"