

# The Capital

## Wal-Mart scraps Crofton plans

### Community's opposition to store cited

By JOSHUA STEWART, Staff Writer

After a year of unified opposition, Wal-Mart has decided to nix its plans for a controversial new store in Crofton.

"We have asked the county executive to withdraw our application," said Keith Morris, a Wal-Mart spokesman.

It would have taken years and millions of dollars before a ribbon-cutting ceremony, he said.

"We've reached a point for us, with the size and scope of this project at this particular site ... that it doesn't make business sense to build," Mr. Morris said.

The proposed store has met opposition from the Crofton community at every turn. Residents feared that the 121,473-square-foot store off Route 3 would hurt the nearby Little Patuxent River, exacerbate traffic problems on an already congested road, increase crime and hurt locally owned small businesses.

This opposition was part of the reason behind the proposed store's demise, said Bill Berkshire, Croftonian and president of Lancer Corp., the company that owns the 20 acres of land Wal-Mart wanted to build on.

"The legitimate, reasonable and realistic community interests are at our hearts, being a resident," he said.

Crofton has dramatically changed since he first began talking with Wal-Mart about five years ago, and will continue to do so as thousands of jobs head to Fort George G. Meade, Mr. Berkshire said.

"As these things were changing, it was clear through Wal-Mart's understanding and ours that the development was years' distance off," he said. "I convinced Wal-Mart to reconsider their thinking."

The announcement came as a relief for Crofton First, a grass-roots organization that promotes smart growth along the Route 3 corridor.

"My mind is in euphoria, it's not thinking really clearly," Madonna Brennan, the group's co-chairman, said last night on hearing the news.

Stopping the Crofton Wal-Mart took an exhaustive effort. Every day included a steady stream of e-mails, research and meetings with consultants, Ms. Brennan said.

"It's corny, but I always say, power to the people," she said.

Mr. Berkshire was instrumental in ending plans for the store, said County Councilman Jamie Benoit, D-Piney Orchard, whose district includes the site proposed for Wal-Mart.

"To his credit, Mr. Berkshire recognized that it didn't have much support," Mr. Benoit said. "I hope that when he comes back to develop the property he gives the community a seat at the table."

Neighborhood participation is welcome and encouraged, Mr. Berkshire said.

"I will take into consideration the needs and minds of the citizens of Crofton, of which I am one," he said.

The chance to help determine the land's fate is one to relish, said Torrey Jacobsen Jr., president of the Greater Crofton Council. The council opposed the store for the same reasons as Crofton First, and has urged County Councilman Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, to push for a moratorium on all development along Route 3.

"We're going to work with him because he's committed to working with the community. Mr. Berkshire deserves some kudos for pulling it," Mr. Jacobsen said.

Mr. Berkshire has tried to build on the land for years. Past plans included a casino, a conference center and a hotel.

By his count, there are 136 types of development his land's zoning allows, and along the way, someone has tried to convince him to try all of them at least once, Mr. Berkshire said.

He has held onto their names and phone numbers, and will try to find another use for the land as soon as possible. So far, he hasn't begun negotiations with any other developer, but he's interested in a mixed-use project, a development that will combine residential, office and retail space, Mr. Berkshire said.

While Wal-Mart won't build in Crofton, a store at the Quarterfield Crossing shopping center in Glen Burnie is under construction. Currently there are no plans for other new stores in the county, but the retailer is considering locations for a new store, Mr. Morris said.

Though the Crofton Wal-Mart wasn't a good idea, the new one in Glen Burnie is fine, County Executive John R. Leopold said, because the Quarterfield Crossing project has better road access than the Crofton and traffic won't be as much of an issue.

"I think that the stores are appropriate if the site is appropriate," he said.

Wal-Mart's earliest plans for Crofton included a 143,000-square-foot store. After a series of neighborhood meetings and engineering studies, the retailer reduced its size by more than 21,000 square feet. However, later plans for the store included a supermarket, a feature Wal-Mart representatives had always said would not be a part of the Crofton project.

Just the fact that plans for the Wal-Mart have been pulled doesn't mean that development

along Route 3 is over. Greenburg Gibbons, a development company, wants to build a mixed-use development with a Wegman's grocery store and a movie theater just south of the Village at Waugh Chapel. Construction could begin as early as the end of this year.

Another retail development is planned for the west side of Route 3, just north of Conway Road.

The canceled Wal-Mart is the second big-box store this week to bite the dust. On Tuesday, Mr. Leopold announced that he plans to buy 30 acres of land in Waysons Corner slated for a Target store that also has met community opposition.

"I think that the citizens have spoken very clearly and effectively on both parcels," he said.

Mr. Leopold has sent a \$6.1 million budget supplement to the County Council, asking it to approve the purchase of the land from developer Petrie-Ross Ventures. If the deal goes through, the county will turn the parcel into protected open space.

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