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Montgomery council should stop fighting Walmart

Council should stop fighting retailer

Walmart poses an especially difficult problem for a county government that objects to the perception that its policies are hostile to business.

The giant retailer wants to build a new store in Aspen Hill in the building that once housed defense contractor BAE Systems. The property would have to be rezoned from office to retail.

Surrounded either by businesses or the homes of potential customers, retail makes sense. Still, some Montgomery County Council members are doing their best to delay action.

The council needed to decide whether the Planning Board would weigh a minor master plan for the site or look at Aspen Hill as a whole. The latter was not an effort to look at deeper issues. It was clearly an effort to put up as many roadblocks in bringing Walmart, with its spotty history with its employees, from coming to the site.

This labor-friendly council would rather rebuild the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory than cast a vote to expedite the construction of a new Walmart.

And considering how agitated local unions have become, the council will sure face greater retribution than a protest at a party fundraiser.

Still, it's a free market. Lee Development Group, the property's owner, has every right to lease the property to whomever it pleases.

The county government does have the right to ensure the 9-acre site has adequate parking. It should study plans to ensure Aspen Hill Road and Connecticut Avenue can handle the extra traffic. A planner with some wisdom and foresight should ponder a future if a nearby Kmart closes because of the competition.

Despite Walmart's reputation of laying waste to nearby small businesses, it will mean lots of jobs — construction jobs to build the store and ongoing jobs for people to work it.

Lee has lined up an impressive array of store owners, who each wrote a nicely desktop-published letter welcoming the retail behemoth to the community.

Some might scoff at the support, but Costco's early experience in Wheaton shows a big-box retailer [can breathe new life into a commercial district](#).

The best course would be for the county to just get out of the way.
