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## Wal-Mart withdraws plans for Aspen Hill

Michael Neibauer Staff Reporter- Washington Business Journal

Wal-Mart has withdrawn its plan to build a supercenter in Aspen Hill, but the landowner said Tuesday it is optimistic other retailers will still find the Montgomery County site of interest.

The Silver Spring-based Lee Development Group announced Wal-Mart, which had planned a 118,000-square-foot store on the site of the vacant BAE/Vitro office building at 4115 Aspen Hill Road, had decided "against moving forward with its plans because of the uncertain length of the county's planning and regulatory processes."

Wal-Mart representatives confirmed the retailer had backed off in Aspen Hill.

"We are confident that this is a great retail location, ultimately offering much-needed shopping options to the underserved Aspen Hill community," Bruce Lee, Lee Development Group president, said in a statement. "Once the property is zoned appropriately for retail use, we expect strong interest from retailers looking to come to Aspen Hill."

The Lee family has owned the property since it was farmland.

In the same release, Boris Lander, founder of the Aspen Hill Business Coalition, expressed "our utmost disappointment" that Wal-Mart had withdrawn. The former BAE building at the Aspen Hill Road intersection with Connecticut Avenue, business leaders say, is a drag on the local economy.

The store was controversial, as is frequently the case with Wal-Mart. Some Aspen Hill homeowners founded a group to oppose it and a MoveOn petition was launched, while several Montgomery County council members had expressed a healthy skepticism, if not outright hostility.

The 262,000-square-foot BAE/Vitro building, constructed in 1968 for the Vitro Corp., has sat vacant since 2010 when BAE relocated. Lee Development has attempted to lease the building, with no success, "proving Aspen Hill is not an office market," per the developer's website.

In the future, it is expected the site will be rezoned, via a minor master plan amendment, for a mix of residential and commercial uses. Lee Development believes retail "is the most viable use for the site in the near term."

Michael Neibauer covers economic development, chambers of commerce, transportation and politics.