

Redwood Valley ready to fight Dollar General



U.S.A. coner store in Redwood Valley actively is against the new Dollar General slated to be developed across the street. Nathan DeHart-Ukiah Daily Journal.

By Adam Randall, udjar@ukiahdj.com, @udjadam on Twitter

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Its been over a week since the greater Redwood Valley community was 'blind-sided' about a potential Dollar General store opening in a vacant lot next to the Savings Bank of Mendocino County across from the Redwood Valley Market, and protestors aren't wasting any time trying to shut out the booming retail chain.

At the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday, members of the 'Stop Dollar General in Redwood Valley' group spoke during public expression, and delivered some 1,000 signatures of opposition from two petitions collected via Facebook and on paper.

Ukiah attorney Brian Momsen, of Carter, Momsen and Knight, said the petitions, "probably have no legal effect, but are symbolic to our elected officials of the discontent."

Momsen, who said he expects to be retained by the owners of the market, would exhaust any administrative action, including the possibility of filing a lawsuit under the California Environmental Quality Act, in hopes of bringing more review to the proposal.

Even though a simple Google search will return results of similar opposition in states across the country, including rural areas in West Virginia and Florida, Dollar General's business is booming.

The Goodlettsville, Tenn.-based chain reported its 2015 first quarter financial results June 2, which compared to 2014's first quarter, shows a nearly 9 percent increase of net sales to \$4.9 billion, compared to \$4.5 billion this time last year. Same-store sales are also up 3.7 percent through the first quarter in 2015, which the company attributes to higher sales of tobacco products, perishables, health care items, candy and snacks.

Despite the criticism, Dollar General isn't slowing down. As of May 30, the company had 12,000 stores in 43 states, with 140 in California, 1,245 in Texas, which is the most out of any state, and only one store in Maine, the lowest out of any state. Its CEO Todd Vasos also announced an aggressive expansion plan to add 900 store locations by 2016.

The business also doesn't shy away from saying it prefers to operate in small, or mid-sized markets, and its communication department calls the style of its stores, "one-stop shopping."

Since Mendocino County currently has no Dollar General locations, the nearest stores are in Nice and Clearlake Oaks in Lake County, which opened despite similar community opposition. Another proposed store in Kelseyville was denied by the Lake County Planning Commission recently this month, however.

Redwood Valley business owners aren't welcoming the proposed new store with open arms.

Alex Chehada, 32, took over ownership of the Redwood Valley Market in 2004 with his brother Anthony when he was 20 years old. He is fearful for his business and its 20 employees and their families, as well as prospective changes to the community.

"It's going to affect most everybody around here," Chehada said.

He said he doesn't want to see Dollar General bring similar big-chain stores to the valley in the future. He offered up an example of when a new Walgreens is built, and sometime after, a CVS Pharmacy typically appears across the street from it in an attempt to compete, he said.

Chehada believes in local products which he sells at his market.

"I buy 90 percent of the wine locally, cheese is local, eggs are from Redwood Valley, pies are from Willits, and farmers bring in veggies and I sell them here," he said. "I'm trying to keep it local."

Carol Soinila, owner of Vic's Place, said she was "blind-sided" like Chehada and everyone else in the community.

"The Planning and Building department and our supervisor said there's nothing they could do, they are just following the law," Soinila said.

Since the site was previously commercially zoned under the county's General Plan, the Dollar General project was free to proceed in obtaining its building permit and plans without any community input, the protest group previously stated.

The towns of Gualala and Mendocino have their own specific General Plans, as does Brooktrails Township, all of which have sought to preserve the historical culture in each area by limiting 'chain-stores.'

"Unfortunately Redwood Valley was not protected in our General Plan," Soinila said. "Ukiah is protected, but not Redwood Valley."

Soinila said the community will be reviewing Redwood Valley's plan with District Supervisor Carre Brown in limiting such future commercial development.

"People for or against Dollar General didn't get a voice," Soinila said. "We the people should have a choice whether we should live with a big box store in our community."

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