

APPROVED MINUTES  
WATKINS CITY COUNCIL  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024

Mayor Rowan called the special meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. at Watkins Village Hall.

PRESENT: Mayor Chris Rowan, Tootz Tschumperlin, Sue Unterberger, Marc Wirz, Brenda Carlson  
ABSENT: None

Others: City attorney Boe Piras, Deputy Clerk Sarah Jacobsen-Krone, Clerk Deb Kramer, and others.

The purpose of this meeting is for the council to gather public input about whether/what regulations are advisable for small box discount stores. The city adopted a one-year moratorium on small box discount stores January 11<sup>th</sup> to allow time to study and research the nature and scope of possible measures of mitigation and regulation of small box discount stores.

Mayor Rowan opened the floor for comments.

Emily Piccerillo noted OSHA violations assessed to Dollar General stores repeatedly for years, which included Abdo's Dollar General in Baldwin, WI. Emily noted Abdo claimed no knowledge of the violations at the July hearing. Emily presented information to the council with samples and laws implemented nationwide in an effort to avoid allowing Dollar General stores into their communities. She also noted there was a digital petition that was signed by 286 concerned citizens in opposition to the Dollar General coming to Watkins.

Colleen Rosenow spoke on behalf of the Watkins Chamber. She noted the chamber's mission is to support and promote local area businesses to maintain a vibrant and thriving community. The chamber has concerns of a large chain store putting these local businesses at risk of closing their doors. The chamber board has a responsibility to promote what's in the best interest of the members it presents and doesn't feel Dollar General represents those interests.

Randy Kramer asked what Dollar General would pay in real estate taxes? Mayor Rowan noted the city was here to gather information, not answer questions. Randy noted years ago, there were 3 grocery stores in town with 800 people supporting them. He noted there are probably 1,000 people here now that should be able to support one grocery store. Randy noted not allowing a Dollar General in the city is telling people they can't come here.

Brad Rosenow, owner of Mafia Customs, noted safety concerns of another access off Highway 55. He also noted the negative impact the business would have on the town.

Jeff Babbitt, owner of J & R Family Market, noted his grocery store is the only store left. He noted Dollar General does not compete fairly. When they move in a community, the local grocery store is the first to go. Jeff submitted a report to the council from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) about how Dollar Store chains hurt communities. Fate, TX has been somewhat successful in keeping out Dollar Stores. Jeff noted if Dollar General opens and J & R closes, it will change the traffic patterns and other business will be taken out of town.

Ron Molitor noted Watkins was a unique community, having a lot of things other towns don't have. He noted his experience at a Dollar General. He asked who would build the store if it does locate here; local contractors or a non-local big company.

Joe Kuechle, owner of Watkins Hardware and KUE Contractors, presented some zoning information for council to consider.

Dollar General developer Paul Abdo noted the reason for the meeting was to talk about a property zoned commercial. The city issued a moratorium to figure out zoning. He noted either the development goes through or completely eliminate retail from the city. Paul stated he doesn't work for Dollar General corporate; OSHA is corporate. People's need to go to a big box store would be diminished if Dollar General comes to Watkins. He asked what the next steps would be. He noted he would love to build a store here. The value of the store would be \$2 million. Is the city going to write a law – no more retail stores in Watkins?

Councilor Tschumperlin presented written information for the council to consider.

Mayor Rowan closed the forum.

Mayor Rowan noted the council would review the information gathered.

Boe Piras, city attorney, noted the purpose here is for the city to decide whether or not to regulate this type of use. He submitted a memo that contained information from other communities with regulations for small box discount stores. The most drastic was a community that made small box discount stores a non-permitted use in any area.

Councilor Carlson questioned if the city could ban this type of retail, but not all retail.

Boe noted there is specific industry regulation to either outright ban or there would be regulations, i.e., special use permit, spacing, regulations that need to provide certain products. There are concerns of employment issues, property upkeep issues, exterior lighting issues.

Councilor Wirz questioned if any of the examples of other cities were contested or litigated.

Boe noted they were and also that cities regulate all types of industry. Boe noted Dollar General is saying they had discussion with the city and they were relying on that so there could be some litigation there.

Reneen Babbitt asked if an economic impact study could be done on bringing a Dollar General into a small community like this.

It was noted an economic study, environmental study and traffic study should all be done.

Boe noted this can be done, but it's a very expensive proposition and takes time. They would have to poll people and do interviews. It could have been done early on, but the council chose to get input from the community. The moratorium is for one year and there are very limited reasons to be able to extend it. Boe asked about holding a workshop as a next step as we are getting closer to January. Council will need to explore some options and allow his office time to draft some sample ordinances.

Carlson asked what happens if the city decides to do a total ban; does it wait for a letter from the developer?

Boe noted anyone has the ability to challenge.

Deputy Clerk Krone noted general retail is not a permitted use in the city's B-2 District. The ordinance states if a use is not provided for within zoning districts, then it's considered prohibited. Boe noted this is where the city would want to make it clear in the ordinance what is allowed and not allowed.

MOTION BY WIRZ TO ADJOURN THE MEETING, SECONDED BY CARLSON. MOTION CARRIED.

Adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Submitted by

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Deb Kramer  
Clerk

ATTEST:

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Chris Rowan  
Mayor