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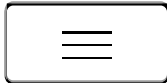


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## Fields: Don't let anti-growth activism destroy economic opportunity

Posted: 6:00 p.m. Tuesday, June 17, 2014

By Jess Fields - Special to the American-Statesman

Texas is known for creating jobs and fostering economic opportunity. But all too often, anti-growth interest groups threaten that by blocking private investment and development.

Recently in Dallas, Wal-Mart was ready to build a new Sam's Club warehouse store in the East Village

development. The plan needed only the City Plan Commission's stamp of approval at its May 22 meeting to move forward, and city staff recommended approval.

Instead, influenced by a small but vocal group of anti-growth activists, the Plan Commission delayed the project for 2 months, until July 22.

In doing so, they yanked jobs away from unemployed Dallas residents. Wal-Mart estimates that each new Sam's Club creates 175 jobs, not including jobs created by other retailers in the development. That's at least 175 more jobs that unemployed Texans can't yet apply for.

The anti-growth crowd coalesced around a petition on the website Change.org titled: "Stop a Mega Store like Sam's Club from coming to Uptown Dallas." The petition's description states that the area has been "evolving into a pedestrian friendly neighborhood," and that "Sam's Club will end all this and fundamentally change the neighborhood as we know it."

It's one thing to have concern for what happens in one's own neighborhood. But to use government processes to change how a private business uses its own property is another thing entirely.

"Sam's Club is NOT an 'urban' destination," the petition description claims. Should anti-growth activists be empowered to decide how resources ought to be allocated in Dallas? The Plan Commission apparently thought so.

Interestingly, the zoning for the 17-acre shopping center where the Sam's was slated to locate was approved by the Plan Commission just over a year ago. But now, Plan Commissioner Bobby Abtahi wants to reconsider the zoning entirely, which could lead to a lawsuit from the developer. Abtahi told the Dallas Morning News: "I don't think that type of retail is appropriate for the urban core."

Another recent instance of anti-growth activism is on San Antonio's East Side, which President Obama recently declared a "Promise Zone." There, the Alamo Beer Company is building an \$8 million microbrewery that looks likely to promote revitalization of an area that has long been economically distressed. But it almost didn't happen.

A group of residents called the Hays Street Bridge Restoration Group sued the city in late 2012 to stop the project, claiming that the land could only be used as a park. In an area with high unemployment, dilapidated structures, and limited economic opportunity, their effort nearly stopped millions of dollars in private investment.

While the lawsuit is still pending, Alamo Beer Company spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to change their plans. They broke ground in December 2013, building instead on an adjacent lot originally intended for parking. The facility will employ 40 people to produce 40,000 barrels of Alamo Golden Ale annually, and provide a much-needed boost to the East Side.

Developers shouldn't have to fear that shifting winds of public opinion will result in government's infringing upon their business. While all have a right to protest, localities should resist the temptation to restrict property rights to satisfy a few loud voices.

Most Texans prefer jobs and economic opportunity to vacant, undeveloped lots.

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---

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---

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---

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---

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