

DownTown Walldart, Olympia—Uniquely Local W/ Super-Low Prices

Political Economy and Social Movements

Winter 2007

Citing the “deterioration of America's downtowns,” Walldart Corporation has begun a new campaign to rebuild downtowns by bringing DownTown Walldart shopping centers to downtowns across the US. After a long and bitter struggle by women's groups, anti-sweatshop groups, labor justice groups, community groups, environmental groups and small businesses to keep Walldart out of downtown Olympia, Mayor Maap and the Olympia City Council finally cut a deal purported to benefit both the city and the Walldart Corporation. The city council's preliminary vote to move forward on the bill concerning the downtown Walldart deal was decided by one, vote 3-2 with two abstentions. Within months and promising to use local construction labor, a high-tech multistoried “uniquely local” Walldart will begin construction where Sylvester Park sits—if the city council passes the motion at the next city council meeting.

The deal would mean that the city and Walldart have certain obligations to one another. Walldart would receive city sales tax abatement and pays a subsidized PBIA rate (Parking and Business Improvement Area). The city would construct a new parking garage in the downtown area. Walldart will be “uniquely local.” This means Walldart pledges to sell local goods when possible (including Olympia Artesian Bottled Water piped from downtown springs now owned by Walldart and organic apples from local farms). Walldart must hire only local residents including in-store management. Walldart will participate in local festivities including Art Walk, the Pet Parade and the Procession of the Species and pledges to be a philanthropic force in the local community quoting the governor’s “passion for education.” In conjunction with the city council and as part of the good neighbor clause in the “uniquely local” deal, Walldart must provide downtown “Safe Shopping” surveillance cameras and safety patrols.

Despite the bad news of the initial vote the “Stop Walldart campaign” has not given up fighting Walldart, but they are running into some serious snags. The PR campaign launched by Walldart—including pizza parties, free plastic samples and large colorful displays of the new facility with its indoor waterfall—has impressed many that DownTown Walldart, Olympia will be a fun, safe place to shop and that their prices really are “super low.” Many in the community and even some in the “Stop Walldart campaign” were convinced of Walldart's good will toward Olympia by the “Uniquely Local” flavor of the proposed deal, the green and sustainable showcase Walldart facility powered by solar, wind and tidal power, and the promise of a revitalized “clean” downtown.

Meanwhile, at the Tumwater Walldart, Associates meet weekly with management for popcorn, pep talks and the famous squishy dance. At this week's meeting, Walldart Management screens the latest team-building training video for the Associates. This week's film shows how loyal Walldart is to its family and how greedy unions are, how organizers are outsiders trying to stir up trouble, how divisive and painful union organizing campaigns can be for everyone, and how unions only turn a happy and free work place into a bureaucratic and rigid work environment.

After the film, the Tumwater Walldart management announces the corporate priorities for the new year. All associates, in conjunction with the “Atmosphere Enhancing Initiative,” will need to pitch in a little extra to store run smoothly and to make a happy, safe and homey environment for Walldart guests and associates. This means that after each shift associates will punch out and join in the honorable and team-building gift of helping to put merchandise back into its proper places and take out any garbage that may be piling up. Associates are told that studies show this kind family activity boosts team spirit and a spirit of volunteerism and both help build community. Next, as part of the “You, Your Friends and Families” program Associates are invited to buy their household supplies at Walldart and to encourage their family and friends to do so as well. Associates can conveniently set

up check-deduction accounts and with the swipe of a card . Family and friends who shop at Walldart will receive a 5% discount and the associate who gets the most referrals will win a \$50 dollar gift certificate. Finally, corporate headquarters has gotten wind that there are union activists in the area. Anyone who suspects any of his or her fellow Associates of trying to break Walldart's team spirit must inform management immediately. Associates will be rewarded for each anti-team associate whose behavior they help to message.

After the first two years of operation, the Tumwater Walldart is doing great, but a few Tumwater retail stores have closed though others in the area have survived. The Tumwater City Council has passed various ordinances prohibiting "loitering," "sitting on sidewalks," "panhandling" and has changed various zoning laws to allow Walldart to use its properties in any way it likes. The Tumwater School District Administration finally has money for new football equipment, band gear, new management textbooks and a new scoreboard emblazoned with a Dart hitting a bull's-eye just under the words "Home of the Wall Dart's."

Strategy Game Rules

1. 15 Minutes. Sit in one of the 10 designated groups, read and discuss the scenario. Each person will come up with his or her own personal character with a name.

The groups are: 1) Local Walldart Management, 2) Olympia and Tumwater Community Members and Consumers, 3) Walldart Headquarters/Olympia Expansion Team, 4) Olympia City Council, 5) Tumwater Walldart Associates A, 6) Tumwater Walldart Associates B, 7) Tumwater Walldart associates C, 8) Activist Groups, 9) Local Retailers 10) Houseless/Low Income, 11) Local Suppliers

2. 30 Minutes. Each group comes to the front of the room, states their group and each person announces who they are giving one sentence on what they think about the situation if they would like. Each group has two minutes--please, budget time accordingly.

3. A "Recent Development" is announced. Each group has **15 minutes** to discuss and make "a move." A move is a realistic action taken by each group or members of each group that is described on a move form and handed in before the ten minutes have elapsed.

4. When the fifteen minutes is up, the moves are announced in the order they were submitted. Be sure to keep track of the moves of other players.

5. Depending on the flow of the game, there may be additional "recent developments" or the moderator will simply let the 2nd and 3rd moves generate the game action.

10 Minute Break

6. At the end of the game, each group will fill out a two-part evaluation. First, "Given the game's outcome, next time we would:..." The second part is: "We want to ask these questions of the following groups."

7. After each group has completed this written evaluation, we'll have an open discussion among all groups.

Recent Developments

At a joint press conference The "Uniquely Local W/ Super-Low Prices" Downtown Olympia Walldart and the City Council announce that they have come to an agreement. The two abstentions have had their demands met and will now vote in favor of the DownTown Walldart Bill.

The Corporation is taking the following actions:

1. Walldart Corporation kicks off its own "Where Would We Be Without Walldart" campaign. As part of the campaign, Walldart will donate downtown extras such as more bike lanes, enhanced bus services, and untrasensor traffic lights that will smooth out traffic flow. The campaign Walldart proclaims will enhance the total quality of life downtown. Led by two of the former abstainers, the City Council and one of the citizen groups endorses the campaign.
2. Walldart begins construction on the DownTown Walldart using undocumented construction workers who live in the local community.
3. Tumwater Walldart publicly proclaims the success of its "You, Your Friends and Families" program and its team building and atmosphere enhancing initiatives. Sales in the post-holiday season are breaking all-time records.
5. Finally, Tumwater Walldart releases three workers for unteam-building activities and will be looking for replacements.

“Given the game’s outcome, next time we would:...”

“We want to ask these questions of the following groups.”

1)

2)

3)

Move Form
Local Walldart Management

Move #1: