



Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph

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NEWS RELEASE

Wal-Mart Threatens Sacred Landmarks

9-year siege by the world's biggest retailer culminates in a David and Goliath battle

GUELPH, On., Canada, July 13, 2004—The world's biggest retailer is poised to build a 135,000 sq. ft. Wal-Mart mega store between a renowned Jesuit retreat centre and three historic cemeteries. The final battle in Wal-Mart's nine-year legal siege will be waged on August 3, 2004 at Guelph's City Hall. Wal-Mart's refusal to locate elsewhere in the city and the residents' dedication to the sacred landmarks is headed to a classic David and Goliath showdown.

The Wal-Mart development is opposed by the Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph and the Residents for Sustainable Development in Guelph (RSD). Rev. James Profit, S.J., Director of the Jesuit Centre, is deeply concerned. "Obviously, the traffic and noise and hubbub of a big box power centre is physically incompatible with the peace and serenity people expect at Woodlawn, Marymount, and St. Ignatius cemeteries. And it goes without saying that Wal-Mart is incompatible with the quiet solitude that draws retreatants seeking an encounter with God in prayer at the Jesuit Centre. If only Wal-Mart would open its heart to an alternate location consistent with the city's pattern of growth, the city could happily accommodate both."

In 1995, First Pro Shopping Centres proposed the development and requested that the land be rezoned—contrary to the City's Official Plan—which offered commercially zoned parcels in other parts of the city. The proposal was turned down by Guelph City Council and other opposing parties. For nine years since, the developer has continued this expensive legal battle. On May 25, 2004, with little discussion, Guelph City Council reversed its former position—against the opposition of a vast majority of delegates at the public hearing. Only the RSD and The Jesuit Centre are left standing against the Wal-Mart Goliath.

The Jesuit Centre, established in 1913, is located just north of the proposed Wal-Mart, on 600 acres of farmland, wetland, woodland, gardens, naturalized landscapes, and walking trails. The site houses internship programs, the Jesuit Ecology Project, a Community Shared Agriculture program, a certified-organic farm, agricultural research sites, an aboriginal sweat lodge complex, several hermitages, and Loyola House, a world-renown Ignatian retreat house. The Jesuits have been intimately involved in the life of the City of Guelph for over 152 years, and helped establish schools, convents, churches, an orphanage, and St. Joseph's, the first Hospital in Guelph.

Our Lady Immaculate mausoleum is located on the grounds of Marymount cemetery—by the north boundary of the proposed Wal-Mart. Nearby, on Jesuit Centre grounds, is the St. Ignatius Jesuit Cemetery, principal burial site for the Jesuit Order in Canada. Directly across the road from the development is Guelph's historic and peaceful 150-year-old Woodlawn Memorial Park cemetery.

Wal-Mart is presently charged with discriminated against women in the largest civil rights class action case in U.S. history (Reuters 06/22/04). The world's biggest retailer has been accused of compromising the life of small communities and has recently been flagged for endangering the entire State of Vermont, according to the US National Trust for Historic Preservation (Reuters 05/24/04). But Wal-Mart's threat to the irreplaceable, sacred landmarks of The Jesuit Centre, St. Ignatius Jesuit Cemetery, Marymount Cemetery, and Woodlawn Memorial Park is a disturbing world first.

On August 3, 2004, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) will conduct the final hearing at Guelph City Hall, 59 Carden Street. The proceedings will run for approximately one week. Public delegations will be heard Thursday, August 5, 7:00 p.m., at the Italian Canadian Club of Guelph, 135 Ferguson Street.

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