

WITNESS STATEMENT OF REV. JEAN MITCHELL

July 20, 2004

I ask that the OMB not approve the lot at the corner of Woodlawn Road and Woolwich Street as the location for a Wal-Mart Store for the following reasons:

1) As an Anglican priest who officiates at interments in Woodlawn Cemetery, I am concerned about the increase in noise from traffic that a Wal-Mart store would bring. A Wal-Mart store would bring an increase not only in automobiles but also in transport trucks bringing regular shipments of supplies to the store. When grieving family members gather in the cemetery to inter the bodily remains of a loved one, this is a particularly vulnerable moment for them. It is the final act of a funeral liturgy and for some members this final act is the most heart-wrenching of the whole service. The interment signifies for them the finality of a loved one's life in ways even deeper than the liturgy in a funeral chapel or church. When people are in this grieving space, they appreciate a quiet, peaceful setting in order to reflect in silence. If major retail stores are allowed to build on the north side of Woodlawn Road West, these precious silent moments would be lost. As well, increased volumes of traffic would cause greater traffic delays as funeral corteges try to turn into the cemetery. Thus, increased traffic from a Wal-Mart would make a situation that is not perfect, but bearable, into something that would be intolerable.

2) As a native Guelphite, the remains of all of my family members (and sometime in the future, mine will be as well) are interred in the northern (Anglican) section of Woodlawn Cemetery which is located on the south side of Woodlawn Road West, I know that an important part of the journey through grief for surviving family members (and I often observe it among many surviving members of other families as well), is the quiet times when they visit the grave sites in the days, weeks, months, and sometimes even years following the burial of a loved one. It is hard to put into words how important and therapeutic these quiet, reflective times are for some people journeying through grief. It is not until one has experienced this journey for her/himself (or accompanied someone close to them) that she/he can understand what this means. If large retail outlets are allowed to build on the north side of Woodlawn Road West, the interludes of quietness that can now be enjoyed would be lost.

3) As a retreatant and guest spiritual director at Loyola House, I appreciate the quiet, sacred space of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph. In today's bustling and noisy world, it is important that any oases of quiet be preserved. Once they have been lost, they can never be regained. It is important to remember that Ignatius Jesuit Centre is more than just the retreat house; it is the whole parcel of land! As retreatants walk the land in solitude, they constantly remark how much the quiet, relaxed pace and the sacred solitude of the land are not only spiritually, but also physically and emotionally healing. But the land will not continue to be this vehicle of healing if the quiet solitude of the land is not protected from increased noise from the highway traffic. Let us not forfeit the unique solitude of this sacred space by attracting large retailers which will draw increased traffic to the area.

4) As a local resident (I have resided at 23 Woodlawn Road East since 1989), an increase in traffic is of great concern. Many older residents in these buildings try to cross Woodlawn Road East on foot as it is too far for them to walk up to the traffic lights at the corner. Needless to say, an increased volume of traffic will make their attempts to cross the road even more hazardous.

It is my fervent hope that the OMB will carefully consider these concerns before approving the sites at the northwest corner of the intersection at Woodlawn Road and Woolwich Street as locations for such large retail outlets. Woodlawn Cemetery, Marymount Cemetery and the Ignatius Jesuit Centre should be considered priorities as they have been in their present locations for many years. Let us keep these quiet, restful green spaces so that our city will remain as humane as possible.

Respectfully submitted,
(The Rev.) B. Jean Mitchell
406-23 Woodlawn Road East
Guelph ON N1H 7G6
Telephone: (home) 519-824-2066; (church) 519-822-1366