



May 2005

Dear Friend,

A giant Wal-Mart does not belong on the banks of the Shenandoah River. Not today, not next year — not ever. You and I understand this; for three years, we have succeeded in keeping Wal-Mart out of this location. But Wal-Mart does not understand. It must be persuaded to seek a different site for its Supercenter.

Shenandoah: a magical name, enshrined in song, a place of history, of memory that belongs not just to Front Royal or even Virginia, but to Americans everywhere. And so, this April, Save Our Gateway (SOG) acted again to protect this precious asset with an appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court.

The History

It all began on July 28, 2003, when the Front Royal Town Council approved their zoning of 121 acres from residential to commercial so that Wal-Mart could build its giant box, 184,000 square feet of space, overlooking this pristine place. The Council took this action against the recommendation of its own Planning Commission. Within weeks, citizens who had organized SOG sued to overturn the rezoning.

A Significant Victory

In May 2004, SOG supporters — you — backed up the court petition with vigorous support of campaigns to elect three new members to the Town Council and a new mayor, all committed to protecting the Shenandoah from commercial development. The four winning candidates are not against growth. They welcome commercial development in a location consistent with Front Royal's Comprehensive Plan — development with careful attention to the attending problems of traffic congestion, neighborhood safety, and environmental harm. The victories of Stan Brooks, Eileen Grady, Tim Darr and James Eastham are also ours. You helped elect them in a clean sweep.

Town Council Actions

After the election and true to their word, the newly elected Council moved quickly to reverse its previous position on the Wal-Mart rezoning. Last January, SOG agreed to a “non-suit” thus postponing further legal action on two counts of the original complaint. This provided State Senator Russ Potts with the opportunity to set up a meeting he had proposed between Wal-Mart and Front Royal officials for the purpose of locating an alternate site. Also, Mayor Eastham and SOG have written H. Lee Scott, president and CEO of Wal-Mart, requesting Wal-Mart's cooperation in identifying this site. If Wal-Mart ignores this request and fails to cooperate, SOG must and will renew its legal efforts. Your contribution is sorely needed for this necessary and costly fight.

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Community Support

The number of organizations opposing a Wal-Mart at this location has grown to include: Front Royal Town Council, Front Royal Planning Commission, Beautification Committee of Front Royal, Homeowners in the Historic District of Riverton, Friends of the Shenandoah River, Warren Heritage Society, A.S. Rhodes Elementary PTA, Front Royal-Warren County Chamber of Commerce, Physicians of Warren Memorial Hospital, The National Trust For Historic Preservation, as well as members of Save Our Gateway. New groups joining the effort are: Warren County Board of Supervisors, Warren County Planning Commission, Virginia Department of Transportation, Scenic 340 Group, Piedmont Environmental Council, and the Coalition For Smart Growth.

The Appeal

In April, SOG filed a Petition of Appeal to the Supreme Court of Virginia asking the court to reverse the findings of the circuit court in the Wal-Mart rezoning case. SOG contends that two critical meetings of the Town Council in June 2003 were illegally convened. This means that both the resulting public hearing and the Council's vote to rezone the Shenandoah property were invalid. A decision by the court is possible before the end of the year. We have a strong case, but, as you and I know, legal costs can quickly mount up, and we have our work cut out for us to keep abreast of them. Can you imagine, however, the sense of pride and achievement that you and I will know when years from now we gaze upon our beloved Shenandoah, free of commercial development — a jewel guarded in perpetuity? Please join me in supporting this effort as generously as possible. And, once again, thank you for your support.



Craig Laird
President

P.S. SOG is the only group whose single focus is the prevention of commercial development on the Shenandoah. Your financial support is crucial. Every dollar donated to SOG comes from a concerned individual like you or from citizen fundraising events.