

Dollar General (DG) in Redwood Valley: In June 2015, Dollar General (DG) and the Cross Development company purchased a property near the corner of School Way and East Road in Redwood Valley, intending to build their first Mendocino County store. DG is a national, publicly-traded, \$18+ billion corporation with over 10,000 stores, and plans to expand with 1000 more stores in California.

For the Redwood Valley proposed store, the County Planning Commission granted permits for the construction, water well, and sewer with no California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review or public input of any sort. Only by word of mouth did Redwood Valley residents become aware of the planned project, shortly after the permits were issued. The Redwood Valley Market began a petition, which was eventually signed by over 1700 people opposing the Dollar General store.

After opening 2 stores in Lake County, DG has faced strong opposition on plans for more stores. In fact, opposition to DG has been widespread nationally, as the corporation follows a business model similar to that of Wal-Mart: sales of cheap, foreign-made products; reliance on “loss leaders” such as cheap alcohol and tobacco priced below prevailing rates, intended to break the competition; low wage, part-time workers with few or no benefits such as sick leave or medical insurance; a “predatory” policy that forces out locally owned businesses that sell local products; and poor safety practices that have led to large fines and penalties from OSHA. With DG based in Tennessee, and Cross Development in Texas, profits from DG stores in California will largely leave the state, and the few jobs will likely displace better jobs at locally owned and operated stores like the RV Market and similar mini-markets. The Cross Development people and their lawyers have made clear to Mendocino County residents that they don’t care what the locals think about their business plans; they have the right, the intent, and the big bucks to go ahead with their developments. In fact, their lawyer threatened, in a public meeting of the Board of Supervisors, to sue both the County and the Board members personally if they voted against the DG store in Redwood Valley.

Residents of Redwood Valley have pursued their opposition to the DG store for many months. We have written letters to County staff, elected officials, newspapers, and appeared in local media with our message. We have attended every public meeting and hearing, met with local and state officials, representatives of the Alcohol Beverage Control Board, and with each other. We have formed the Redwood Valley Municipal Advisory Council (RV MAC), with the support of Supervisor Carre Brown and other members of the Board of Supervisors. The purpose of the RV MAC is to provide a forum for Redwood Valley residents to make our views known to the County regarding all decisions they make about our community, providing a liaison between residents and public officials. We don’t want another development with such a poor record as the DG

corporation to be welcomed here without being able to review and assess whether it is appropriate for our community. We don't want Redwood Valley to be turned into just another American strip mall. There are better ways, smarter ways, to develop a community.

When DG chose a commercially zoned site for the Redwood Valley store, the only governing documents affecting the decision were the County General Plan, revised in 2009, and the Zoning Code. The General Plan (GP) contains a single page discussing Redwood Valley, yet that page represents the sole "environmental review" that was required for the County to issue a "permit by right" to the development company. No "further" environmental review was required, and indeed, DG staff alleged that the county would invite a law suit for even trying to add any further review, such as assessment of water, sewer, air, economic blight, noise, light, archeological, diesel fumes, road access and wear, or any other effect. Neighboring farms, businesses, fire station, over-abundance of alcohol outlets—none of these factors would be taken into account.

A suit filed by the RV Market owners challenged the lack of CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) review, which might have provided some opportunity for public review and assessment. The County Planning and Building Services department is required to provide public notice of various phases or aspects of a development. The attorneys for the RV Market missed a quietly posted notice, and 30 days expired during which they had to file for further CEQA review. It's not clear why the deadline was missed. Certainly, the County staff was well aware of the lawsuit, but they didn't contact the RV Market's attorneys. The deadline slipped by. That, too, was appealed, and on December 9, 2016, a final hearing was held in Superior Court. Judge Henderson, soon to retire, stated that he expected to rule in approximately the next month. However, he further stated to the crowded court room that he must rule on the legal issue at hand, not whether he personally believes the DG store should be built in Redwood Valley. That sounded a lot like what was said by the County Planning Commission and the County Board of Supervisors when both groups voted in the majority to support the DG store: they wanted to help Redwood Valley in its opposition to the store, but their "hands were tied."

Over 130 letters opposing an alcohol license at DG were sent in the past year to the Alcohol Beverage Control Board (ABC). To date, no hearing has occurred regarding the license. As of December, 2016, the ABC was trying to negotiate with DG about limiting certain aspects of an alcohol license. Sheriff Tom Allman wrote letters to ABC, but his opposition was rather limited (see letters posted on this website, obtained under freedom of information statute). Even with those requests, the "limitations" that ABC has proposed are inconsequential.

Redwood Valley now has our Municipal Advisory Council, and the opportunity to create an updated community plan, which would define what we want our community to be in

the future. If we want smart growth—that is, a community in harmony with nature, in support of local business, a haven for residents and visitors and for the creatures with whom we share this place—then we have to create that vision, and the reality, for ourselves. Everyone who lives here needs to take a stand, and help make Redwood Valley the home we imagine and deserve.

UPDATES AS OF NOVEMBER, 2017:

On January 11, 2017, Judge Henderson issued his ruling, denying the Chehadas' suit. The final ruling was supposed to be issued in February. Subsequently, they filed the next step of their suit in superior court in San Francisco. Even though the DG site has closed escrow, DG has not begun to build--and this is why!

Meanwhile, time passed and no hearing was scheduled by the ABC, despite their internal procedures that require a hearing within 90 days of a protest. On Dec. 20, 2016, the Dept. of Alcohol Beverage Control replied to over 130 letters sent by concerned citizens last year opposing issuance of an alcohol license to Dollar General. Since then, the ABC offered a couple of Petitions for Conditional License proposals for DG, proposing that certain wine and beer products in smaller packages not be sold; loitering should be prohibited around the stores; and the store hours would “only” be allowed from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. (longer hours than, for example, the RV Market). There was to be NO prohibition of alcohol sales, as was requested by the 130+ petitioners. Still, no public hearing was scheduled. Callers to ABC were told that the Santa Rosa office had issued its report for ABC legal staff in Sacramento.

Then came October 9, 2017, and fire storms swept across Northern California. On October 12, 2017, during the height of Mendocino County's fire emergency, ABC issued a notice (delivered by certified mail to protestants) stating that a conditional permit to DG would be issued (with the above conditions) unless a protestant requested a hearing in writing no later than 5 p.m. on November 2, 2017. Residents were not home that week—we were still evacuated. RC MAC Vice Chair, Sheilah Rogers, contacted the local offices of the State legislative delegation, who contacted ABC. On November 1, 2017, ABC Chief Counsel, Jacob L. Rambo, sent another letter to protestants, stating, “The Department is committed to assisting all Californians impacted by this disaster who have matters pending before the Department, and we are exercising as much flexibility as the law allows....pursuant to Business and Professions Code section 24015, the Department finds good cause to reissue the notices, and it currently plans to do so sometime in early 2018....If you intend to submit a written request for hearing, please do so within fifteen (15) business days of the date of the second notice letter....” So it appears we have another few weeks to review ABC's proposal and submit requests for a hearing in Mendocino County about an alcohol license for DG.