



GREENWICH VILLAGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Greenwich Village, Chelsea, Soho, Noho, West Village, East Village, Union Square, Flatiron

**Statement of Tony Juliano
President, Greenwich Village-Chelsea Chamber of Commerce**

RE: When Walmart Comes to Town

TO: NYC Council Committees on Economic Development, Small Business, and Community Development.

DATE: February 3, 2011

Good afternoon Speaker Quinn; Chairpersons Reyna, Koslowitz and Vann; and council members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the possible effects of a Walmart store opening and doing business in New York City.

My name is Tony Juliano and I am the President of the Greenwich Village Chelsea Chamber of Commerce. Our Chamber represents businesses in an area of Manhattan that stretches south from Canal Street up to 34th Street and from the Hudson River across to 3rd Avenue. Let me say that in a different way. Our Chamber represents businesses in Soho, the West Village, Noho, the East Village, the Flatiron, Chelsea, and Union Square.

When I say the names of each of those neighborhoods different images come to mind, don't they? True they are not that far in distance, but they are very different one from another. Someone choosing to live in Chelsea, for example, might feel out of place living in the East Village. And, no one would accuse the West Village of being a clone of Union Square. Each neighborhood is unique in its own way and each has its own special character.

It's one of the things that's so inviting about NYC. People have come here over the years to start their families and their businesses. Many have been here for

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generations. The shops and stores that have grown up here give each of these neighborhoods much of its special character ... its flavor.

But these businesses are already struggling to survive in this city. But we'll manage, with your help. We know you understand the difficulties we're facing. When a small business leaves a neighborhood, part of that neighborhood's character is forever changed. We look to the City Council to help protect the city's small businesses and the special nature and cultural texture of the neighborhoods in which they reside.

This brings me to Walmart. This issue is actually bigger than Walmart. It's really about all of these big, powerful mega-retailers of which Walmart is the biggest and most powerful. They work so well in the vast recesses of the suburban highway system, and we congratulate and admire their success. But they wreak havoc in a closely knit, diverse neighborhood in a city like ours. Particularly those neighborhoods with deep historical and cultural significance, like those in the area of Manhattan served by this Chamber of Commerce.

We've all read the studies, which I'm sure you'll hear about over and over today. But they tell us what we already know because we have common sense. If a Walmart store opens in close proximity to established businesses in one of our well-known neighborhoods, many of those small businesses that compete with Walmart would go under. And for awhile we'd be left with a giant Walmart megastore and lots of empty storefronts surrounding it.

Eventually some business would re-emerge and find ways to compete around the edges. But at what cost? At what cost to the families who owned the businesses, to

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the neighborhood's unique character, to the area's tourism prospects, and ultimately to the quality of life of the remaining residents?

This is a bit of a hypothetical exercise. I do not know what locations Walmart is considering in our city. To my mind, it is not likely that they would choose to locate in one of the neighborhoods served by our Chamber. The cost structure here is inherently high – some aspects of which Walmart would not be able to control. This would jeopardize their low cost, low price business model. However, since this Chamber serves so many small, independent businesses in historic neighborhoods of unique and rich character, we could not sit back and watch these proceedings from the sidelines.

After careful consideration and a thorough look at the neighborhoods served by the Greenwich Village-Chelsea Chamber of Commerce, we could find no suitable location for a Walmart megastore to set up shop and we would oppose them here should they choose to do so.

Thank you for your time.