

COALITION FOR A BETTER JEFFERSON

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Jefferson, WI— On January 3, 2006, the City of Jefferson Common Council again refused to let voters decide whether impacts of proposed developments should be considered before annexing large parcels of land. The Council’s actions came days after a December 28, 2005, court order that stopped all Common Council action on proposed annexations of more than 15 acres until the court decides the legality of the Council’s actions.

“The direct legislation provides a cost-effective way to look at the potential impacts associated with proposed developments in rural areas,” said John Rhiel, spokesman for Coalition for a Better Jefferson. “The city can require proposed developers to pay for the studies, just like they do in nearby Stoughton,” he added.

The proposed direct legislation would require the Council to consider environmental, traffic, infrastructure and economic impacts that large developments would have on the City prior to approving an annexation of more than 15 acres.

Currently, Jefferson is not required to study environmental, economic or infrastructure impacts anywhere in the development process.

The impact studies will help promote business and protect rural land owners. “We believe that businesses look for strong communities and stable local economies. Incoming businesses will feel secure when they know that Jefferson is committed to conservative and well planned development,” said Rhiel

Recent studies have shown that big-box development may cost more in city services than they generate in tax revenue.

“The direct legislation could help the City avoid development that harms the Rock River and area drinking water supplies,” said Rhiel, also a member of the Rock River Coalition. One study showed the transformation of open land into parking lots generates 16 times more run-off. Polluted run-off from parking lots and other paved surfaces is the leading cause of water pollution in Wisconsin. “With the Rock River about a half-mile from the proposed site of the Wal-Mart Supercenter, the City should consider the potential impacts,” added Rhiel.

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FAST FACTS:

- The Coalition for a Better Jefferson is represented by Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc., a nonprofit environmental law center, and David Halbrooks, a Milwaukee attorney.
- Midwest Environmental Advocates is Wisconsin's first and only non-profit, public interest environmental law center. Midwest Environmental Advocates provides legal representation and community organizing assistance to groups that are working to protect air and water resources. For more information, go to www.midwestadvocates.org.
- The Coalition for a Better Jefferson is a local citizen group committed to responsible development in Jefferson.
- If approved, the proposed Direct Legislation would require that the City of Jefferson Common Council review traffic, infrastructure, environmental and community impact studies before approving annexations of over 15 acres of land.
- The proposed Direct Legislation allows the Common Council to assign the costs of impact studies to the developers, relieving tax-paying residents of any financial burden associated with the impact studies.
- The Direct Legislation received 456 signatures from Jefferson residents. Only 307 signatures were required to put the ordinance on referendum ballot.
- On November 15, 2005, City of Jefferson Common Council voted 8-0 to deny the direct legislation petition
- On December 19, 2005, Coalition for a Better Jefferson filed a Writ of Mandamus action, seeking a court order telling the Council to approve the legislation or send it to a referendum.
- On December 28, 2005, Jefferson County Circuit Court Judge Ullsvik granted a temporary injunction preventing the Jefferson Common Council from taking action on any proposed annexation over 15 acres in size.
- On January 3, 2006, the City of Jefferson Common Council rejected a motion to approve the legislation as well as a motion to set a referendum date. Instead the Council voted 8-0 to support their November 15, 2005, original vote and deny the direct legislation.