

Initiative against Wal-Mart to go to voters

By Kevin Clerici

Originally published 11:09 a.m., November 25, 2008

Updated 11:09 a.m., November 25, 2008

An initiative aimed at blocking Wal-Mart or any large grocery store from opening in Ventura is officially going before voters.

Despite pleas by supporters to adopt the proposal as written, the Ventura City Council voted unanimously Monday to place the measure on the next regular city election, Nov. 3, 2009.

Under election law, the council had two choices Monday: adopt it or put it before voters. Councilmembers expressed reluctance to approve it, saying it could effectively thwart businesses the community wants and would do nothing to generate well-paying jobs that supporters would prefer to see.

If approved, the initiative would keep the world's largest retailer from opening one of its traditional stores in

Ventura by banning any new store selling groceries that is larger than 90,000 square feet. Any store without groceries would be allowed.

Big grocers also could face special conditions if they decided to move into an existing but vacant store.

Although the initiative never mentions Wal-Mart by name, proponents, including both citizens and grocery union groups, began crafting the measure when news surfaced that Wal-Mart wanted to replace a now-shuttered Kmart on Victoria Avenue with a store of its own.

Wal-Mart has not filed a formal application to replace the Kmart building, which it controls, but presented a conceptual plan to build a 150,000-square-foot store with groceries when it last met with city leaders more than a year ago, city officials said.

The initiative specifically targets large grocery stores but not all big-box outlets. It would not ban a large electronics store like Fry's or Best Buy, or a department store, and it exempts warehouse stores that require memberships, like Costco or Wal-Mart owned Sam's Club, officials said.

