

CASE STUDY 4: Grandtown's New Public Library

In a 6-4 vote the city council of Grandtown has decided to renovate and relocate its library. The library is currently located in a rural area near the edge of town. The facility is over sixty years old and has been in need of renovation for years, but as in many cities, fiscal constraints have stood in the way of any improvements. The planned location is a commercial property adjacent to a frequently visited strip mall. Walmart is planning to build a store on the same lot. The library and Walmart will share one large parking lot. Residents of Grandtown will be able to combine their trip to the grocery store with a trip to the library.

The plans have not been finalized, but the city and Walmart have entered into an "Agreement of Intent to Co-locate." The city has been negotiating the details with Walmart executives for about a year. Grandtown's goal is to obtain a contract similar to an agreement between the City of Dallas and Kroeger, which has received a lot of press lately. By all accounts the relationship between Dallas and Kroeger has been a big hit. The building design there is so impressive that it won an award from the Texas Society of Architects, and usage of the library has increased every year since the city and Kroeger began their working relationship. Grandtown's list of objectives for the partnership is consistent with the contract executed in Dallas. The important details are as follows:

Replace the old 6,500 square foot facility with a new, more modern 9,000 square foot facility. The library will occupy one corner of the building, which will be connected to a new Walmart store.

The property will be owned jointly by the city and Walmart.

Walmart will design and construct the library. The corporation will complete the site planning, conduct environmental testing, install lighting, and landscape the property.

The city will approve Walmart's zoning applications, which are currently the subject of much controversy. As is the case with many Walmart stores, the local residents are not all convinced that having a Walmart is in their best interest.

A committee appointed by the city council will work with library staff and Walmart's architects on designs for the modern facility. The design will meet or exceed city requirements for approved building materials, disability access, and other specifications required by various ordinance and codes.

Walmart will hire the construction crew and oversee the workmanship. Once the library and store are constructed, Walmart will designate a small area within its store to issue library cards.

The library will designate a children's area and maintain qualified staff to watch children while their parents shop. From Walmart's perspective, the plan will draw more customers. From the city's perspective, more children will be exposed to reading.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the city's plan? What are the advantages and disadvantages to the co-location?
2. After the co-location, will the library still be a "public organization"? Explain how you arrived at your answer. Will it lose any of its "publicness"?
3. In what ways might the objectives of Grandtown and Walmart conflict? Is the plan in the best interest of the citizens of Grandtown?
4. With respect to operations in the library, in what ways might the lines of authority be compromised?

5. Where do you think the impetus for the plan came from?
6. What forces do you think have influenced the city council debate and in what way?
7. According to accounts in Dallas, the agreement between the library and Kroeger “saved the library”? Do you think this is true?
8. Are any aspects of the plan more or less acceptable? Discuss your reasoning.
9. How will the city council know if the plan is a success?