

**Unlike Wal-Mart, Costco plans get a quick OK**  
**Officials say the low-cost warehouse retailer was easy to work with on a new store in west Omaha.**

Costco's plans for its first Nebraska store earned a swift endorsement Wednesday from its west Omaha neighbors and city officials.

It was a marked contrast to the nine-month battle over the Wal-Mart that will go in at 72nd and Hickory Streets.

No one objected Wednesday as the developer presented plans to the Omaha Planning Board for a large commercial development anchored by Costco on vacant land on the north side of West Dodge Road near 120th Street. The development, to be immediately west of Menards, received the Planning Board's unanimous endorsement.

"Costco just has a whole different corporate culture," City Planning Director Steve Jensen said of the members-only retailer that is frequently compared with Sam's Club, a division of Wal-Mart.

Costco, Jensen said, conformed with all the city's requests. Other than a standard interior floor plan and requirements for where the entrances are placed, Costco will go along with any exterior requirements, he said.

For the Wal-Mart, the city fought and negotiated with the company over landscaping, parking lots, lighting, building materials, the size and design of signs, the width of sidewalks and nearly every other detail of the store's exterior.

Jay Noddle of Noddle Cos., the Costco project's developer, speculated that of the 450 Costco stores across the country, there are 150 different looks.

The property northwest of 122nd Street and West Dodge Road has long been primed for development. The land once belonged to the family that started Kitty Clover potato chips in Omaha. More recently, Rose Blumkin, founder of Nebraska Furniture Mart, owned it. After Blumkin died in 1998, the land was held by four trusts that benefit the families of her four children.

Given the land's past ownership, Planning Board member John Hoich quipped, "I always thought we would see Nebraska Furniture Mart West out there."

But Costco, a low-cost warehouse retailer that carries appliances and furniture, could be a competitor for Nebraska Furniture Mart.

The 153,000-square-foot Costco won't be the only retailer on the 25 acres of commercial property. Noddle said other retailers, restaurants and offices would be part of the development. An additional 13.6 acres could be used for apartments, town houses or a church, Noddle said.

If the additional Planning Board and required City Council approvals come through, Noddle said, Costco could begin construction in the spring and be open for business nine months later.

Costco has received praise from some of the same groups that frequently criticize WalMart, including employee advocates. Last year, the New York Times reported that the average pay at Costco was "\$17 an hour, 42 percent higher than its fiercest rival, Sam's Club."

Costco caters to a somewhat more affluent clientele. Households pay \$50 a year for membership. The basic Sam's Club membership is \$40.

Wal-Mart began in small towns and moved into larger urban areas. Costco's roots are more urban.

The closest Costco stores to Omaha are in West Des Moines, the Kansas City metropolitan area, Minneapolis and Denver.

All the improvements to the Omaha site would be paid for by the developer.

Mike Parizek, vice president of the Candlewood Homeowners Association, endorsed the plan before the Planning Board on Wednesday.

One reason Jensen thinks neighbors accepted the development is a design that prevents dirt and pollutants from draining into Candlewood Lake. The development also plans landscaping at the back of the property, he said, and nearby neighborhood associations were notified early in the planning process.

Several Planning Board members thanked Noddle for his willingness to meet with neighborhood groups before bringing the proposal to the board.

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