

The Metro Section

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Council Committee Opposes A BJ's Store in the Bronx

By WINNIE HU

In a sign of growing opposition to warehouse-type stores, a City Council committee moved yesterday to reject a proposal to build the first BJ's Wholesale Club in the Bronx.

The Council's Land Use Committee voted 13 to 0 against the application for a 130,000-square-foot store on Brush Avenue, near the intersection of the Hutchinson River Parkway and the Bruckner and Cross Bronx Expressways.

The matter will go next week before the entire Council, which is expected to follow the committee's lead in rejecting the application.

Yesterday's committee vote capped months of lobbying by union leaders and some neighborhood groups against the chain store, which sells food and other merchandise at discounted prices to customers who pay a membership fee. There are now two BJ's stores in Queens and one in Brooklyn.

The opponents have cited concerns about increased traffic around the proposed Bronx store and have assailed what they call the "anti-union" practices of the chain. Union officials have sought to cast BJ's as a test case for the looming battle over Wal-Mart, which wants to open its first New York City store in Rego Park, Queens, in 2008.

In response to a question yesterday about Wal-Mart, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said he did not believe

it was the city's job to decide which stores should open here. "We have to make this city open to everybody," he said. "There's always two sides. Some people like big stores, some people don't like big stores, but that's in the end what the marketplace should determine."

Councilwoman Melinda R. Katz, the chairwoman of the Land Use Committee, said her main concern over the application for the BJ's store was the potential traffic problems. "Anytime you have a big-box store, there is a large concern about traffic," she said. "We turned it down because we felt that the impact on the community was real."

Amy Russ, a spokeswoman for BJ's, said the Bronx store would create more than 250 retail jobs and had wide support in the Bronx community. "We remain hopeful that we will be successful in bringing a BJ's to the Bronx," she said.

In voting against the application, the committee went against the recommendation of the district council member, Madeline T. Provenzano; the Bronx borough president, Adolfo Carrión Jr.; and other local officials.

Ms. Provenzano dismissed the committee's concerns about traffic, saying that the site was far from schools and residential neighborhoods. The Council has final authority over land-use matters, but the store's developer, the Related Companies, could sue to try to overturn its decision.