

TOWNHOUSES INVADED *by* BIG BOX

by Ben Koush

photo by Sharón Steinmann

A NEW LAND USE CONTROVERSY HAS ERUPTED in the largest US city without zoning. A weed-covered property, originally housing the Houston Compressed Steel Corporation, a purveyor of scrap metal, on Yale Street south of the Katy Freeway, is slated to become the new site of our first “inner city” Walmart. Preliminary renderings show the new Walmart surrounded by a standard, supersized parking lot, with no special provisions made for its urban location. The people are angry! The Facebook page named STOP THE HEIGHTS WALMART! is liked by over 6,000 people. Yet, calling the area “the Heights” is perhaps something of a stretch. The former industrial site is technically in one of the old additions of the West End. What surrounds it is not cute little Victorian cottages, but mostly beige townhouses built in the past few years, many now sporting signs that read “Super Neighborhoods not Supercenters,” surmounted, no less, by the silhouette of a lonesome tricycle. We want gentrification, but not too much, see? The chance to preserve whatever actual historic architecture that once existed here has passed. (A nifty modern building designed for the offices of Compressed Steel by Joseph Krakower in 1951 was listed by Houston Mod as endangered and then demolished a few years ago.) The question left now is how can this new development perhaps be made more neighborly? Or, does it even matter since the Pollyanna vision conjured by protesters never really existed, and the physical remains of the place’s working-class past have been so thoroughly erased?

Within sight of the proposed Walmart site, townhouse owners post protest signs.



Super Neighborhoods
not Supercenters
STOP HEIGHTS
WALMART.ORG