

# Walmart

From A1

we operate." He added: "Like any property owner, we want equality and uniformity with our property tax assessments."

Walmart and other big-box retailers have been challenging assessments on their stores ever since a 2008 ruling by the Wisconsin Supreme Court opened the door to the "dark store" method of setting a store's taxable value based on similar properties that are empty or vacant.

Mount Pleasant and other surrounding communities have faced similar disputes with Walmart, Walgreens or other big-box stores.

## By the numbers

The Walmart store at 1901 Milwaukee Ave. in Burlington has been assessed at \$8.6 million for several years, resulting in a property tax bill currently set at \$166,567 a year.

In the lawsuit, Walmart argues that Burlington assessors have placed an inflated value on the store for tax purposes. The suit alleges that the \$8.6 million assessment is not uniform compared with other properties in Burlington and elsewhere.

"The 2020 assessment of the property was excessive," it states. "As a result, the tax imposed on the property for 2020 was excessive."

Walmart not only wants its assessment lowered to \$4.5 million, the company also wants the city to refund part of Walmart's tax bill from last year, and to pay for Walmart's attorneys in the lawsuit.

Based in Arkansas, the global retail giant last year reported \$13.7 billion in profits on sales totaling \$559 billion.

In its response to the suit, the city is arguing that its assessment on Walmart's store is not excessive and is not out line with what other big-box retailers are assessed.

In comparison to Walmart's assessment of \$8.6 million on its 27-acre property, Menards is assessed at \$8.7 million for its nearby 22-acre property, Kohl's is assessed at \$4.1 million for its 6-acre property, and Tractor Supply is assessed at \$3.1 million for its 4-acre property.

## Law could change

Local government officials in Ra-

cine County and elsewhere have lobbied state officials in Madison in recent years to take action aimed at closing the so-called "dark store loophole."

Gov. Tony Evers has included measures to address the issue in his budget proposals, but Republican leaders in the Legislature have killed those measures and allowed the status quo to continue, according to Chet Agni, a spokesman for the Democratic governor.

"The governor will continue to advocate for this commonsense reform to protect the property taxpayers and local municipalities across the state who this loophole negatively impacts," Agni said in an email.

Republican lawmakers and business lobbyists in the past have offered to study the issue, but some also have defended the method.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Burlington, said in 2019 that there was no "consensus" on how to approach the issue.



Vos

Vos could not be reached for comment on Walmart's lawsuit against Burlington.

State Rep. Tyler August, R-Lake Geneva, who represents the Bohner Lake area in the southwestern corner of Racine County and is the Assembly's speaker pro tempore, also could not be reached for comment.



August

State Rep. Greta Neubauer, D-Racine, accused Republicans of blocking action that would close the loophole and force big-name retailers to pay their fair share of property taxes.



Neubauer

Neubauer said homeowners and small business owners typically end up footing the bill by paying higher taxes.

"Our local governments are forced to raise taxes on everyone else to make up for that lost revenue," Neubauer said. "When big-box retailers use this maneuver to get big tax breaks, homeowners and small businesses lose out, and more money flows out of town to corporate head offices."