

Seabright Neighbors to appeal decision allowing Harley shop

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SANTA CRUZ — Dozens of Seabright-area residents opposed to having a motorcycle dealership as a neighbor promise to make a better case at Tuesday's council meeting than they offered at last month's Zoning Board hearing.

"This is a particularly nuisance-creating venture," said Lynn Zachreson, a member of the newly formed Seabright Neighbors group. "The noise studies said there wouldn't be an increase ... but your ears don't average out a loud noise."

Seabright Neighbors is the group that appealed the Zoning Board's 3-2 vote allowing the Harley-Davidson motorcycle dealership to occupy the Eberts/Harts building at Soquel and Seabright avenues.

As a result, City Council members will consider whether the dealership is an appropriate business for that portion of the Eastside, and whether the dozens of mitigation measures imposed by the Zoning Board are enough to head off conflicts with neighbors.

Mike James, who owns Santa Cruz Harley-Davidson on Commercial Way, wants to move to a better location that offers more room for his popular business.

In addition to selling both Harley-Davidsons and Buells (a racier Harley model designed to match competitors' models), James plans to have a repair shop, a Harley-Davidson museum and a retail outlet that will sell clothes and other items with the Harley logo.

The proposal does not specifically fit into the type of land uses envisioned in the Eastside Business Area Improvement Plan, but the Zoning Board decided that the benefits of a healthy business at that location outweighed that fact.

In addition, the Zoning Board adopted the mitigations suggested by city planners to reduce the likelihood of conflict with neighbors. These included:

- Requiring people coming out of the dealership's parking lot to turn left on Seabright toward Soquel Avenue instead of traveling into the heart of the residential area.

- Forbidding organized rallies, club events, touring stops or any other activity at the site that would draw groups of motorcycle riders.

- Allowing the city to conduct periodic noise and/or traffic studies at the owner's expense if neighborhood complaints are received about patrons violating the other conditions.

- Requiring the dealership to service motorcycles only between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The retail portion of the facility, as well as the museum, could be open later, and on Sunday.

These conditions, coupled with the fact the dealership would provide an additional \$75,000 in sales-tax revenue to the city each year, convinced the majority of the Zoning Board to support the proposal.

But Seabright Neighbors is not convinced, and members hope the council won't be, either.

"The mitigations suggested ... are basically not enforceable," said Zachreson. "There's not going to be more motorcycles (in the neighborhood)? How can they say that?"

The group emphasized that it's

that location, but would support one that better encourages pedestrian-oriented or evening business uses.

The proposal for a motorcycle shop/retail outlet/museum, said Seabright Neighbors, does not provide services for the neighborhood or serve as an anchor tenant to attract other businesses, as called for in the Eastside Plan.

The group said it will ask the council to find a location for the shop that would be better able to handle the increased traffic and noise.

Owners of the Harts/Eberts building, however, will tell the council that they spent years trying to attract businesses that might be more palatable to the neighbors, but nothing came of it beyond a few nibbles.

But John Swift, the land-use consultant who is representing James, believes that the extensive number of business owners in the area supporting the new shop because it could bring in new customers tells a different tale.

"I think it's very consistent with the Eastside Plan," said Swift at the Zoning Board meeting, adding that 40 percent of the business would involve retail sales of clothing.

James said he plans to invest between \$600,000 and \$700,000 in the historically significant building, including remodeling its facade to better reflect its architectural roots. The museum, he said, would be a one-of-a-kind facility that would "pay tremendous homage to an American icon."

Studies in the neighborhood using 14 Harleys revealed no significant increase in the overall noise levels of the area. Neighbors suggest, however, that when one motorcycle goes by, its distinctive sound can be clearly heard.

Swift told the council in a letter that people who live and work near James' current shop near Highway 1 have not complained about the noise.

"Past experience also shows that only one-third of all visitors to the store travel there on motorcycles," said Swift.

Some Gault School teachers and site council members, however, are concerned that increased noise and traffic would affect student learning.

"Seabright is already a business street with distractions on a regular basis," said a report from Seabright Neighbors. "Knowingly adding another strong source of noise pollution would be a strong disservice to the community."

Swift said opponents simply don't understand the "high-class operations" that Harley dealerships are these days.

"I think (opponents) have the wrong perception of what this will be," said Swift. "I think the image of the grease and the hoodlum type is so far removed from these new designer dealerships."

Councilman Scott Kennedy, in a letter to neighbors concerned about the noise, said he would be forced to look at the bigger picture on Tuesday as he considers the issue.

The issue will be discussed at the council's evening session, which begins at 7. The meeting will be in the council chamber at City Hall, 809 Center St. The meeting is open to the public.