

Council OKs Hyatt Hotel

Neighborhood
residents speak out
against project

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1-15-14

SANTA CRUZ — A City Council meeting to review minor changes to a planned hotel's parking scheme became a hard-fought effort by Lower Ocean residents to halt the project.

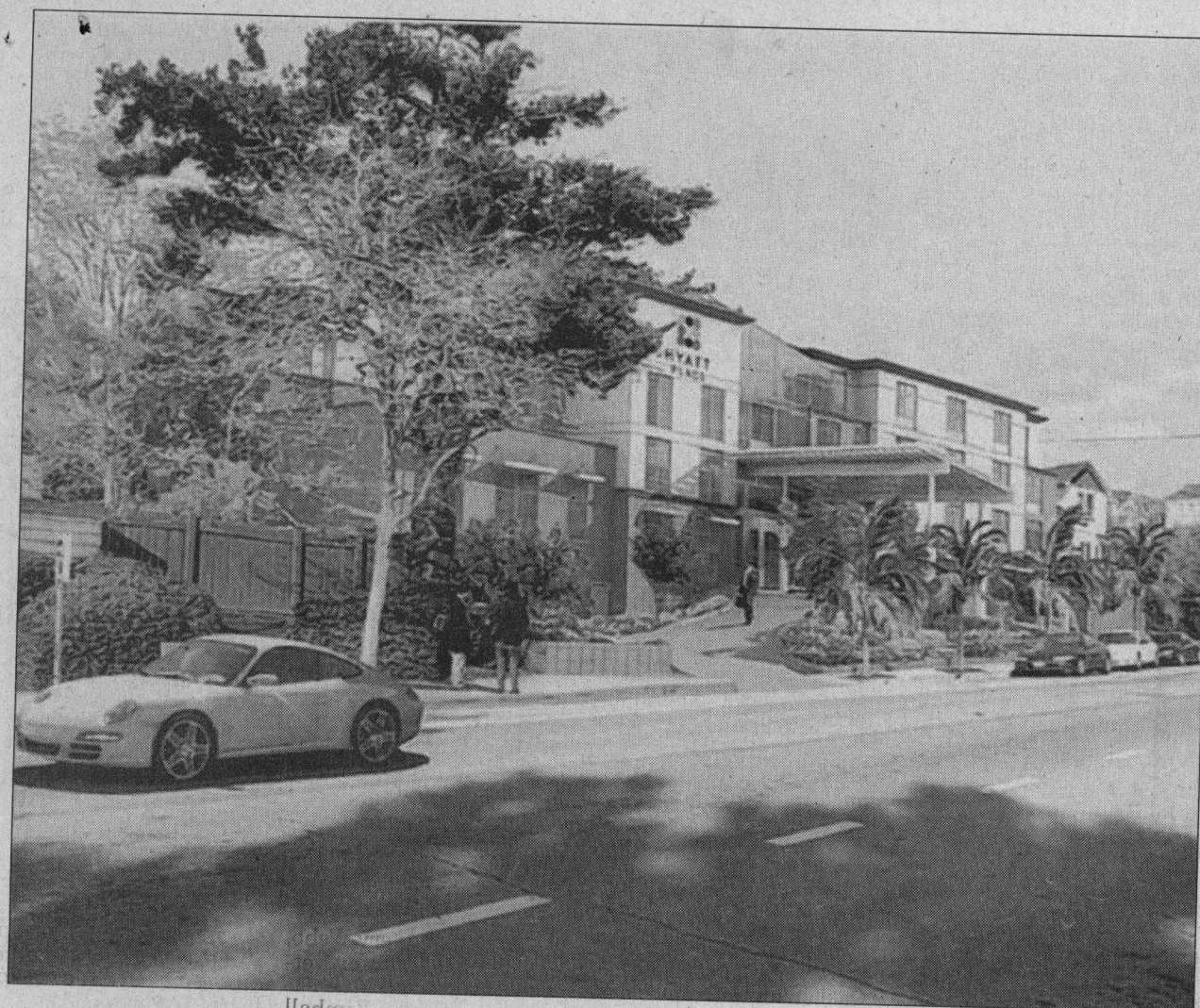
A couple of dozen residents took aim at the already-approved Hyatt Place Hotel project during a three-hour public hearing Tuesday designed to review parking modifications by local hotel owner Tejal Sood.

Sood received council approval in May 2011 to build a four-story, 111-room hotel where a former church stood on Broadway near Ocean Street.

Her alterations include removing one floor of parking and cutting the number of hotel rooms to 106. Automated hydraulic parking lifts that stack cars will make up for the lost floor, she said.

Despite a roomful of opponents, council members voted 5-1 in favor of Sood's amended plan to add 24-hour valet service and about 18 parking lifts. Hotel guests will not

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A rendering of a four-story Hyatt Place Hotel proposed for 407 Broadway off Ocean Street appears in the application submitted for city review. CONTRIBUTED

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be allowed to self-park their cars and neighborhood parking will be prohibited.

Councilman Micah Posner, a Lower Ocean resident elected in 2012, was the lone dissenter.

"This hotel is going to bring in a ton of people and a number of those people don't act responsibly," Posner said. "Every hotel in our neighborhood brings our neighborhood down. That's a fact."

The majority of council members praised Sood and her family for their strong 40-year track record of running exemplary hotels in Santa Cruz — the Hampton Inn and Comfort Inn.

An upscale hotel, they

said, will bring jobs and bolster the city's image and tax base.

"I see this hotel as improving the area," Councilwoman Pamela Comstock said. "I'm mostly hoping it inspires other hotel operators in the area to upgrade."

Criticism of the hotel included concerns over additional traffic in the crowded neighborhood, lack of adequate parking, alcohol use by hotel guests and a commercial building simply not meshing with a neighborhood that faces significant public safety issues such as illegal drug sales and prostitution.

"We need real environmental oversight," said Benjamin Pappas, a Riverside Avenue resident. "What about the vibration of the lifts? What if there's a hydraulic leak?

An environmental review is a requirement."

Parking lifts will be encased in concrete under ground, creating about the same noise as an elevator, which would not require further environmental review beyond the initial study's negative declaration done several years ago, Planning Director Julianna Rebagliati said.

Riverside Avenue resident Esther Greenberg said it's not pleasant living close to so many hotels. She hoped the council would ax Hyatt Place all together.

"We definitely don't need another alcohol establishment in the community," Greenberg said. "I'm beginning to question who the council represents and I'm taking note for the next election."

Deputy Police Chief Rick Martinez reassured council members the police department has analyzed the hotel's plan to serve wine and beer, and doesn't expect to see widespread problems from it.

"We consider it a low-risk outlet," Martinez said. "Alcohol is not the primary use for the site. The alcohol use gave us the opportunity to add conditions to the project."

Several folks praised the planned hotel for the positive elements it's expected to bring.

"I think the increased visualization with the 24-hour valet and more people in the area will be positive," Broadway resident Lindsay Johnson said. "I support it."

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