

Auto Plaza - S.C.

# Auto plaza wheels set in motion

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SANTA CRUZ — Don Starr of Santa Cruz Motors and the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce like the idea of the town having an auto plaza.

The City Council agreed with Starr and Chamber President Gary Reece Tuesday afternoon as it unanimously started the process by which the city will redesignate 13 acres on the north side of town as a plaza for car sales.

The plaza would be located between Highway 1 and Josephine Street to the south and River Street and the San Lorenzo River to the east.

Starr told the council, "I've been in the car business 30 years and an advocate of auto plazas for 25." He urged the council, "keep the car dealers in the city."

Two major dealers, restricted by the lack of available and affordable land in Santa Cruz, have moved out, Starr reminded the council.

Reece assured the council the chamber supported the car plaza, saying, "It's a good location."

Sharply disagreeing with him and the council, property owner Edith Maridon said she wants to develop her two parcels in the 13 acres, but doesn't want an auto plaza.

She said the city has turned down her plans, including an apartment building, in the past, claiming her land is in the flood plain.

She said recently city planners have told her the flood-plain designation is expected to be changed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency "and the parcels will be buildable."

City Senior Planner Joe Hall confirmed FEMA is being petitioned to change flood plain maps so the Maridon property and other parcels in the area "will be out of the floodway (while) not out of the flood plain."

Maridon questioned the city's right to put an auto plaza in an area that's questionably a flood plain. "Will the auto plaza be on stilts?" she asked.

Hall said an auto plaza does have some things that make it more reasonable for a flood plain, saying most of the area in a plaza is asphalt parking and the buildings can be moved around on planners' maps.

To make way for the plaza, the city has to amend its General Plan so the property in question can be rezoned to community-commercial from its present industrial zoning.

The newly designated area is the same location that was marked for an auto plaza in the city's General Plan in 1978, but was removed when local businesses and other interests protested.

Since then, the city has had no designated land for an auto plaza.

Interest revived in January when three auto dealers said they wanted to put a plaza in the city's "greenbelt," which are open-space lands bordering town that are protected from development until 1990 by a voter initiative.

Tuesday, Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt said, "It became evident there were constraints (against development) in the greenbelt that were overwhelming."

The General Plan amendment process takes five to six months.

Starr said he hopes the plaza will become a reality "because we're going to move in two to five years."