

✓ East Side Harley-Davidson center OK'd by Santa Cruz Zoning Board

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SANTA CRUZ — A divided Zoning Board OK'd a new Harley-Davidson dealership for the Hart's/Ebert's building on Soquel and Seabright avenues, but members put the brakes on any Sunday servicing of the noisy motorcycles.

The 3-2 vote came after a lengthy public hearing Thursday night that drew significantly more supporters of the proposed dealership than detractors worried about noise and traffic in the neighborhood.

"I think this will be a good addition to the neighborhood," said William Schultz, chairman of the Zoning Board. "I just don't see this issue of noise and nuisance ... as a problem. It's a pig in a poke. ... I think we all have some kind of subconscious fear of Harley-Davidson outlaws on bikes."

With the approval, however, came a long list of conditions recommended by the planning staff to ensure that neighborhood concerns are addressed.

Among them were requirements that riders use Soquel Avenue rather than Seabright, where there are more homes; that the site not be used as a

rallying point for organized rides or other activities; and that city officials would be able to step in at any time to conduct additional noise studies at the dealership's expense if there are complaints.

Another key provision was that although servicing would be allowed from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, no such activity would be allowed on Sundays.

The stringent requirements chafed Harley-Davidson dealership owner Mike James, who unsuccessfully tried to soften them in order to head off unreasonable restrictions down the line.

James, who has owned Santa Cruz Harley-Davidson at 17th Avenue along Highway 1 for a year, said after the meeting that he wasn't sure if he would appeal the board's restrictions to the City Council. An appeal on either side must come within 10 working days.

"My essential concern is whether this use overall will in fact benefit the quality of life in that neighborhood," said Zoning Board member Robert Bickal, who joined Bryan Briggs in voting against the project.

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"This dealership and service department is just not what I visualized for being an appropriate neighbor for the existing businesses."

Numerous business, however, sent letters to the city in support of the project. A handful of residents also supported the plan to bring in not only a Harley dealership, but also a one-of-a-kind museum and a retail outlet similar to what was in the Capitola Mall during the holiday season.

"As both a Gault (School) parent and a 17-year homeowner/resident of the Seabright neighborhood, I do not feel that this business poses any more of a negative impact on the area than the existing businesses do," wrote Ann Jorgensen. "We are not talking about a business that serves alcohol, surrounds moral issues or threatens the noise levels of the neighborhood."

Many other residents, however, wrote letters opposing the dealership, believing that the admittedly noisy motorcycles would be a detriment to the neighborhood. Three showed up to voice their concerns at Thursday's meeting.