

Bagel bar takes place of Lorene's

Planners give OK for alcohol sales at new cafe, bar

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The former Lorene's Packing Shed, a city institution for many years before closing last summer, will see new life as a bagel cafe and bar.

Richard and Veronica Vigil, the owners of two existing bagel bakeries, purchased the restaurant on Main Street near Auto Center Drive last fall, and received unanimous approval from the city Planning Commission on Monday to sell alcohol at the new cafe.

The cafe was one of several proposals considered by the commission at its first meeting in the new year.

"Bagels and beer," Veronica Vigil said with a laugh. More seriously, she explained the new site will offer an expanded menu with offerings like calamari.

Vigil, who grew up in the city and graduated from Watsonville High School, also said the plan calls for preserving the historical photos that adorned the walls of Lorene's as well as one of the original Lorene's signs. She hopes to open for business in March. The couple also will continue to operate the Bagel Café & Bakery on Main Street near the Nob Hill grocery store, but will close the retail outlet on Walker Street when the new café opens.

A more complicated issue was a proposal for a 130-unit housing subdivision on 18 acres on Errington Road. The Western Pacific Housing Inc. proposal would add 95 single-family homes and 35 townhomes to the city's housing stock. But the property borders on an industrial zone, and nearby businesses like Graniterock are concerned about the compatibility of uses. Two or three months after moving in residents will start complaining about the noise from its industrial neighbors, said Chris Mann of Graniterock.

"This project is not likely to yield happy residents," he said.

The council, with five of seven members present, unanimously recommended the City Council approve the project, though it required the builder to meet with business owners to work out ways to design homes to mitigate the impact of industrial neighbors.

A proposed six-home subdivision on a 1.5-acre parcel off Altamont Drive fell one vote short of the five needed for a favorable recommendation to the City Council after a handful of neighbors expressed concerns that the project would increase traffic, decrease neighborhood security and jeopardize the stability of a slope on one side of the property.

One commissioner present at Monday's meeting was Roberto Garcia, the former president of the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Santa Cruz County.

The chamber's finances are the subject of a police probe, and Garcia has been scarce since the allegations of financial mismanagement, fraud and check forgery surfaced.

He has not returned calls from the Sentinel, and skipped the commission's December meeting.

Monday he explained that he had missed the meeting because of surgery to correct a deteriorating knee originally injured during his military service in Vietnam.

Before the meeting, he said he had discussed the chamber's difficulties with authorities, but he declined to comment further, saying his lawyer had advised him not to.