



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Furniture refinisher Russell Nystrom says plan would force him to close.

# Not everyone is happy about auto center plan

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SANTA CRUZ — A new auto center may be an economic boon to the city of Santa Cruz, but it may spell unemployment for Russell Nystrom.

Nystrom's furniture refinishing operation is one of a number of businesses that will be displaced if the city condemns and otherwise acquires 12 acres at River Street and Highway 1 for Steve Bergstrom's 10 auto dealerships. For the last 16 years, Nystrom, 51, has rented space in an 82-year-old structure widely known as the "log cabin." Monday, he said his business would not survive a move.

"I won't be able to find anything comparable for what I'm paying," the craftsman said. "I'll be out of work; I'll have to leave town."

Nystrom, who first moved to Santa Cruz in 1970, said he was drawn to the town by an "ambiance ... which is fast becoming something of the past."

"I saw Santa Cruz as sort of a crafts community — and it more or less was during those days," said Nystrom, who also rents space for painting and sculpture studios at the log cabin. "I half identified with the so-called 'progressive' City Council, but it seems like their bottom line is money."

"There's 14 small businesses in this

little area, and it supports about 175 people, and they (the council) want to ... give it to two or three rich people.

"This is not what I think of as a 'progressive' kind of alliance."

Nystrom's landlord, Chuck Scherer, said Monday that his River Street property is "not for sale — and it's especially not for sale to Bergstrom."

"I'll bitterly oppose and fight it to the highest court in the world, if they take my property away to give it to another businessman," Scherer said.

Scherer, whose other River Street tenants include Santa Cruz Truck and Trac-

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tor, Adco Electric Co. and Santa Cruz Auto Body, said the city had refused to let him develop his property in the past. "I've tried six or seven times to put up new structures on our open land and it's been denied."

A neighboring property owner, Ed Webber, said that he had no desire to relocate his photocopy machine sales and leasing business. "We're happy where we are," said Webber, who opened the River Street store with 12 employees in the mid-1970s. Webber said he now has more than 25 employees and has been trying without success for the last three years to get permission to build an 8,000-square-foot addition to his building.

He said he was told he couldn't construct the addition because the building site was in a floodplain. "But now that (the city) is trying to develop it," he said, "the flood plain has gone away."

Webber, 74, isn't eager for a fight with the city. "It depends on how much they come up with for the property," he said.

City officials said Monday that they are prepared to condemn land on River Street if property owners won't sell it willingly. Landowners cannot do much — even in court — to stop the city from acquiring their property through condemnation proceedings.

The city is required only to deposit the amount of money it believes the property is worth into an escrow account before taking the land.

Under the law, property owners can go to court later if they believe the city is not offering them a fair price for their land.