

REPORTS & COMMENTS

Auto Plaza S.C.
Green belt?

Business

✓ 4-9-87 GT

Greenbelt Auto Plaza Idea May be Dead

PROSPECTS for an auto plaza in the city-designated "greenbelt" north of the Yacht Harbor may be all but dead, and a city subcommittee is working with auto dealers to find a viable alternate site to prevent a loss of some \$600,000 in sales tax revenue.

Citing pressure from national auto distributors to move to larger quarters, owners of three of the city's larger auto dealers (Toyota, Ford and Nissan/Dodge) announced in February plans to build a 30-acre auto plaza on the 62-acre Kinzli property, and set about trying to get a special election in the city to allow them to do so.

Since then, the plan has bogged down in a difficult permit process, leading the chief of permits of the state coastal commission's local chapter — which has jurisdiction over the property — to predict the proposal would never be OK'd by the environmentally inclined agency.

"This is really a very, uh, *imaginative* idea to propose at such a loca-

tion," said Les Strnad, a staff adviser to the coastal commission who is not a voting member of the commission. "(The Kinzli property) is a floodplain, there are habitat issues involved, all kinds of drainage issues, access from Capitola Road. I haven't seen anything like this in my 14 years with the coastal commission."

Toyota, Nissan and Dodge dealer Lee Courtright, who's been speaking for the dealer group, said he had a letter of "non-committal" on the proposal from the coastal commissions, district director Ed Brown, that the project is still alive.

Courtright added that the dealers are still optimistic and have no intention of dropping their plans for a special city election.

However, city councilmembers John Laird, Mardi Wormhoudt, Joe Ghio and Mike Rotkin all agreed that the obstacles will in all likelihood prove insurmountable, and that the ball is now in the dealers' hands.

Even if the proposal were to get

city voters' OK, the hurdle presented by the coastal commission and annexing part of the land from the county would take several years if it could be done at all.

For those reasons, a city subcommittee is working with the auto dealers to find another place in the city for the auto plaza in an effort to keep sales tax revenue from moving to the county (most likely, to a commercial parcel along Highway 1 between Soquel Avenue and Capitola Road).

A combination of congestion, crowded sales space and alleged pressure from distributors has already caused several dealerships — Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Cadillac, Buick, GMC trucks, and smaller outfits — to leave downtown Santa Cruz for better visibility and access in Capitola and Scotts Valley, taking sales tax dollars with them.

There are at least three sites on city

property where the plaza could be built: near Wrigley's on the west side (which is not considered a prime location by auto dealers seeking higher visibility), at Sky Park Airport in Scotts Valley (outside the Santa Cruz city limits and requiring zoning changes), and at North River Street between Highway 1 and the El Rio mobile home park.

The city would probably have to condemn some properties along River Street to pave the way for an auto plaza there, but councilmembers Ghio, Rotkin and Wormhoudt agreed the site remains an option. Courtright, who tried to get permits for an auto plaza in the area in years past, said he was still open to the idea if the city deems it viable.

"It's one of the very best sites," said Ghio, who stressed the idea was very tentative. "It's viable, and we'll see if it's a possibility." •

—Sam Mitchell



GREG PIO

The scenic Kinzli property will stay rural if the Coastal Commission has anything to say about it — which it does.