

City moves to seize plot

Pacific Ave

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The City Council unanimously agreed Tuesday night to go after Pacific Avenue property owner Ron Lau's 20,000-square-foot site through eminent domain.

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The move allows the city to proceed with the next step: use the courts to acquire the land and pay Lau fair-market-value for the plot.

Lau's plot on the north end of Pacific Avenue, next to Lulu Carpenter's cafe, was leveled during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and has since sat empty, except for weeds and graffiti, which city officials say make the site blighted and in "serious disrepair."

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lic official than eminent domain," Councilman Tim Fitzmaurice said. "But, this is a wound in our community. I'm convinced of that."

During the past 15 years, Lau, a Watsonville resident, has attempted several projects at the location that meet his deeply held environmental and ecological ideals, but none has ever taken shape.

Council members were asked Tuesday by the Redevelopment Agency to adopt a resolution that allows for eminent domain — the government's ability to condemn private property for public use, provided owners' receive fair compensation.

In a last minute attempt to hold off city condemnation of his property, Lau showed up at Tuesday's eminent domain hearing with a development team that presented the council a plan to build a "green" project that includes apartments, restaurants, parking and retail space at the site.

Lobbying on Lau's behalf included an attorney, a Moraga-based construction manager, financier and architect.

The group told council members they signed a 99-year lease with Lau on Tues-

day. The lease, they said, allows them control of what happens on the property.

"It's tempting not to take this action (eminent domain)," Councilman Ed Porter said. "But I've looked at proposals from him over the years. And I'm a little troubled these plans arrived this afternoon."

Lau's attorney William Markham, a real estate lawyer from San Diego, criticized the city's action as an "unjust taking" and said it's likely they will fight the city's decision in court.

The vote in favor of eminent domain comes after several failed attempts to negotiate a selling price.

Lau declined to comment on the vote.

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