

Wedding bell blues chime for Capitola business owners

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■ El Salto Resort's expansion nixed.

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CAPITOLA — There will be some disappointed brides-to-be this year.

But the Capitola City Council and residents living near the El Salto Resort say they are fed up with the parking nightmares and out-of-control wedding receptions held in their Depot Hill neighborhood.

Resort owners had proposed expanding their business by increasing the number of wedding guests to 150, adding events and extending hours of operation.

On Thursday, the council rejected a recommendation by the Planning Commission supporting the business expansion to 125 guests, declaring that the conditions of last year's use permit had not been met.

Several residents complained to the council about traffic and parking problems, noise violations, and guests trespassing onto their properties.

Council members said they felt business co-owners Robert Blodgett and Doug and Robert Dodds had deceived them by advertising and scheduling larger weddings before their permit had been approved.

"I feel we've been put-on again this year," said Mayor Bruce Arthur. When the application was discussed at length last year, Arthur said he was reluctant to disappoint brides who had already planned their weddings.

This year, despite the fact that some weddings will likely have to be scaled-back or canceled altogether, Arthur said he didn't "feel awkward about it at all."

As council members were hashing out conditions of the new permit late Thursday, the resort's wedding planner, Marcia Blodgett, appeared to be calculating the financial — and emotional — implications of their actions.

"I was operating in good faith," she said. "Clearly, they don't want us to be in business."

Blodgett had already booked 18 weddings, four of which exceeded the maximum number of guests allowed under their current permit.

"Frankly, I don't have a lot of patience left on this issue," said Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan, calling this the owners' "last chance."

She pushed for a 6-month review of their compliance and also urged residents to lodge complaints of violations.

"I share Stephanie's disappointment," said councilman Tony Gualtieri. "I think the neighbors have a voice and we need to reflect that voice."

Blodgett said she had gone to great lengths to encourage neighbors to contact her with their complaints, and that she did not receive one call.

"I was unaware until last week that there were problems," she said.

Council members also criticized the owners for not having a business license and was considering restricting the hours of operation, prohibiting rehearsal dinners, requiring increased shuttle service for off-site parking, and that a security guard be present at all functions to log complaint calls.

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