

AUTO PLAZA -Capitola

Auto Row approved

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CAPITOLA — Work will begin in 10 days on Auto Row — mid-county's largest commercial project since the opening of the Capitola Mall nearly a decade ago.

The City Council Thursday night unanimously approved the project, which will bring four Santa Cruz area auto dealers representing 10 makes of cars, to the city.

Auto Row will be located on the 10-acre parcel next to Highway 1 between 41st Avenue and Wharf Road. The dealers anticipate an eight-month building schedule, and they plan to relocate by the end of this year.

Together the dealers will cover 417,419 square feet of land on the city's largest remaining vacant parcel. The actual build-

ing area of showrooms and repair shops, however, will be considerably smaller at 62,728 square feet. The remainder will encompass car lots, parking, roads and landscaping.

Gary Reece, spokesman for applicant DaPont Construction of Santa Cruz, told The Sentinel after the meeting that grading on the site is expected to begin within 10 days. He estimated the \$6- to \$8-million project will generate much more than \$100,000 a year in tax revenues for Capitola.

Marina Pontiac-Cadillac-Buick, at 120,619 square feet, will be located closest to 41st Avenue and the entrance to the project off an extension of Gross Road. Santa Cruz Porsche-Audi-Isuzu will be adjacent at 94,992 square feet. Santa Cruz British Jaguar-Subaru at 69,524 square

feet and Roy Baldwin Oldsmobile-AMC — at 132,314 square feet and the largest of the dealerships — round out Auto Row.

While the proposal has been strongly supported by the city, with the processing of General Plan changes and rezoning given top priority, Reece was quick to note that the city "definitely didn't roll over."

A detailed list of 72 conditions of approval were passed by the council. The biggest of those was a projected \$206,000 traffic impact fee to be paid by the dealers for future traffic improvements to nearby 41st Avenue.

Reece requested elimination of that fee, based on a traffic engineer's report that project traffic would be "minimal" compared to the former residential use pro-

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jected on the site. He maintained the fee could possibly make the project infeasible.

Council members agreed that the fee possibly could be lowered, and they directed City Manager Steve Burrell to return in two weeks with a specific cost. Burrell indicated that the fee could be lowered since the state has agreed to pay for all of the 41st Avenue overpass widening — a change that occurred since the city established the traffic impact fee formula.

Councilman Dennis Beltram recommended a "20- to 40-percent fee reduction," which he based on the fact Auto Row won't be located directly on 41st Avenue. Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan, however, argued, "Even though it's not directly facing 41st Avenue, the auto center will surely impact traffic on 41st." She fought for retaining the fee, as it is to pay specifically for improvements at 41st Avenue and Gross Road.

Council members maintained the dealers should pay "their fair share," and left it up to Burrell to determine what that fair share should be.

A 40-foot-high "landmark" clock tower that the dealers pushed hard for as an identification symbol was turned down. The council did agree, however, to consider a future variance to the city's 16-foot-high sign ordinance if an acceptable design were to be proposed. Again, Harlan was the lone person to fight against ever allowing a 40-foot-high "landmark."

Mayor Michael Routh argued against taking such a staunch stand. "Sure, 40 feet sounds high, but the city still has complete control over approving any proposed design. Look at the Washington Monument."

Other concessions by the dealers included elimination of auto body repair and

mechanical painting facilities at Santa Cruz British Motors and Roy Baldwin — the dealers closest to Loma Vista Estates Mobile Home Park — due to concerns of noise and odors.

An eight-foot-high acoustical sound wall was redesigned to 10 feet, and outside public address speakers on the lots were eliminated for noise control. Roof design on the front of the buildings will also be modified.

A rear garage door to the engine repair shop at Roy Baldwin Motors was also reinstated by the council, conditioned on the dealers being able to meet maximum decibel levels outlined in the environmental impact report. The rear door had been eliminated by the Planning Commission.

Finally, the council added a condition on top of another condition added by the Planning Commission regarding drainage improvements to handle the auto center's storm drainage/surface runoff.

Concern was expressed about solvents, such as grease and oil, being discharged into Soquel Creek. Reece clarified that only storm drainage/surface runoff would be flowing into the creek. Interior drainage from repair shops will go through a double-chamber filtration system before entering the sewer system.

That double-chamber filtration system will be monitored by the city under one of the added conditions. Storm drainage/surface runoff during the summer will also be dispersed into the landscaping.

Only two persons spoke during the public hearing. Jerry White warned that a chemical spill could occur and end up in the lagoon at the beach. Hugo Barbic added, "Capitola is a small town. Capitola-by-the-Sea won't be Capitola-by-the-Sea anymore. It'll be used and abused."