

✓ \$18 million auto center proposed

By GUY LASNIER
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — Five automobile dealers and the Live Oak-Soquel Redevelopment Agency propose to spend roughly \$18 million to buy and prepare 21 acres on Soquel Avenue for an auto sales center, according to a predevelopment agreement released Monday.

The Board of Supervisors, sitting as the redevelopment agency's board of directors, is expected to discuss the agreement today. It calls for the agency to spend \$9 million to buy 19 parcels between Chanticleer Avenue and Mattison Lane, then turn them over to the dealers who would build an auto center. The dealers would put up \$8.9 million. In exchange for the county's participation, the dealers would promise to sell cars there for 25 years.

The owners of the affected properties were surprised Monday to hear their land is targeted for development. "We're not for sale," said Sam Nigh Jr., owner of Nigh Lumber, and two of the largest parcels under consideration. "We like what we're doing here."

Jake Seigel, whose family owns eight parcels totaling 7½ acres at Chanticleer and Soquel avenues, said he wasn't surprised at the developments but had not been notified.

"If the price is right anything is for sale," he said.

Both Nigh and Seigel said they regularly get offers but hoped to develop their land themselves.

A smaller land owner, Mike Stebbens, owner of Performance West auto repair shop on Chanticleer Avenue, said he "had not heard from anyone" until notified by a reporter. "I didn't know the project extended this far," he said.

Stebbins said he expected his property and its five rentals would be his retirement. "I'm interested in selling if the price is right," he said.

Under redevelopment law, the agency could condemn and acquire the properties if it is unable to reach agreement with owners.

The five auto dealerships — Santa Cruz Motors, Toyota of Santa Cruz, Ocean Chevrolet, North Bay Ford and Santa Cruz Nissan-Dodge — would put up \$8.1 million for their part of the deal to buy the land, plus an additional \$800,000 in demolition and grading costs, according to the agreement signed Friday.

They would be responsible for construction costs. The redevelopment agency would spend an undefined amount for sidewalks, curbs and gutters.

The site is across the highway from the Skyview Drive-in, where a similar auto center was proposed in 1988. The deal fell through last year after a number of financing and political problems.

The Soquel Avenue location has the advantage of prime freeway exposure and access. All but three parcels are zoned for commercial use. Some is raw land. Besides the lumber yard and repair shop, current uses include a used car dealer, plumbing supply house, small apartment building, private homes and the Skills Center rehabilitation facility.

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