

7-26-78

Protest Made Against Idea For Envisioned Auto Plaza ^{S.C.}

A plea not to treat River Street business operators as "second class citizens" was made to the city Redevelopment Agency Tuesday by John Santee, chairman of a group opposing a proposed Auto Plaza in the area.

Santee said that the businesses represented in Citizens Against Auto Plaza employ more than 400 persons, pay more than \$1.5 million in taxes and are as much entitled to city concern as seven auto dealers who have expressed interest in locating in the proposed plaza on a 30-to-35-acre site in the River Street - Highway 1 area.

Santee claimed the plaza would cost at least \$10 million, with the auto dealers putting in perhaps \$2.18 million. He claimed it is unfair to spend some \$10 million of the taxpayers money "to dispose of businesses already there in favor of other businesses paying a little more sales tax dollars."

But City Manager David Koester, who acts as secretary to the Redevelopment Agency, told the members that some of the statements by Santee "are misleading."

Koester added: "Some things have to be said because it really scares people when they see things in a newspaper that really have no basis in fact.

"The total cost of the project is around \$6 million and \$2 or \$3 million would come from the dealers. The \$10 million figure is misleading. The best figures available in the financial feasibility report are in the \$6 million range. If the project were \$10 million it would not really be in the cards.

"To say jobs would be lost also is misleading. The redevelopment laws have rigid requirements that businesses displaced by redevelopment have to be relocated in another suitable area within the community."

Santee told the agency there are no suitable locations in the city for businesses that would be displaced if the auto plaza were actually undertaken. Then he said:

"We don't care to be known as second class citizens because we didn't make the propaganda the auto dealers did or because we don't have the salesmanship to get the city to provide us with \$10 million worth of free land."

And, later, Santee declared: "This project is not the will of the people, it is the will of the auto dealers and maybe some people in the Planning Department." Santee said that if need be he and his group would seek an initiative election to

stop the project, and he stated his group has already gathered 500 signatures on petitions since noon Monday.

Bert Muhly, an agency member, said it was the Redevelopment Agency, and then the Santa Cruz City Council, that authorized expenditures of money for a feasibility study of the auto plaza. He added that the agency and the council also have to consider the political implications of the project, but that this is another question. He stressed that the planners and consultants do nothing without agency and council authorization, "so that if you want to blame anyone, the buck stops here."

Charlotte Melville, agency chairman pro tem in the absence of Larry Edler, stressed there will be many public hearings and many decisions before the final decision is made.

But she stressed also: "We are concerned about the auto dealers, about keeping them in the city."



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