

Home Depot store clears final hurdle

Business - 14
**\$26 million project
faces legal challenge**

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✓ **WATSONVILLE** — It's official. Santa Cruz County will have a Home Depot.

The Watsonville City Council on Tuesday approved the last measure necessary to bring the home-improvement giant to 14 acres off Green Valley Road and Loma Prieta Avenue. But the \$26 million project must clear a legal challenge before construction begins.

Last year, the company gave up on plans to build a store in Soquel after seven years of stalled negotiations with landowners and constant opposition.

The City Council approved a 98,000-square-foot store — smaller than the original 118,000-square-foot proposal — and a 24,000-square-foot garden center before an audience of 75 people who wore stickers to designate which side of the issue they were on. The audience was evenly split between those wearing orange "Yes on Home Depot" stickers and neon green "No Home for the Depot" stickers.

The smaller project left a larger buffer between the home-improvement store and homes in the Cherry Blossom neighborhood. They also added a number of conditions to the approval, including requiring Home Depot to:

- Help pay for the construction of a sidewalk on Loma Prieta Avenue. The council will consider at a later date whether to install a crossing guard for nearby school children.

- Consider adding trellised plantings around the building.

- Monitor the truck traffic arriving and leaving the store.

- Pay a \$20,000 job-training fee.

- Give Watsonville residents first preference in hiring for the 200 jobs.

As soon as the city files its intent to allow the store to proceed with the county, opponent Jenny Bragar said the "No Home for Depot" group will file a lawsuit to stop it.

Among other things, she said the suit will allege that Watsonville did not require necessary biotic and other. Please see **HOME DEPOT** on **BACK PAGE**

Home Depot

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er studies before approving the environmental report in June, that the store will be located in a slough and that it is too large for the location.

In other action, the council:

- Approved Hacienda Walk, a 33-unit, for-sale condominium project off Harkins Slough Road near the Sunset Cove development.

- Agreed to place a measure on the November ballot that would increase the city's hotel tax 1 percent, with that increased funding going to the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council. Residents of Santa Cruz and the unincorporated areas of the county also will vote on the measure, which is designed to promote the county as a resort destination.

- Approved the use of identification cards issued by Mexican consulates as valid identification for Mexican nationals residing in the city.

City officials say allowing undocumented immigrants to use the cards for identification purposes will save police officers time when processing detained foreign nationals whose only offense is lacking valid identification.

Immigrants can use the cards to obtain a library card, a senior citizen discount fare on public transportation or to retrieve an impounded car, to cross the border to visit Mexico, receive airline tickets and establish a bank account.

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors last month unanimously approved accepting the cards as valid identification. Statewide, the city of Oakland, the San Jose Police Department, the Orange County Sheriffs' Association and Association of Police Chiefs, the city and county of San Francisco and the city and county of Los Angeles accept the cards.

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