

Battle lines drawn over auto plaza plan

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SANTA CRUZ — The political battle lines are already forming over a recently announced proposal for an auto plaza on land in the city's greenbelt zone.

Neighborhood opposition has started to take shape to fight the proposal to undo the city's growth-control measure to accommodate the development of an auto plaza on vacant property just west of Capitola Road extension on the city's eastern boundary.

Faced by charges from project opponents that council members had violated the state open meeting law two weeks ago when voting on the car-plaza proposal, the council Tuesday repealed that vote and unanimously approved another vote that virtually duplicated the first.

They voted to endorse a policy of "strong commitment to keep the dealerships in the city" and formed a council subcommittee "to work toward the accomplishment of that goal." They also appointed Joe Ghio, Mardi Wormhoudt and Michael

Rotkin to the subcommittee.

Council members indicated they would work toward some kind of compromise that would accommodate the car dealers — but not necessarily on this site — and keep a "significant" amount of the greenbelt property in open space.

They took the second vote after local Sierra Club activist Dave Bockman — also a member of the Resource Defense Fund, the legal arm of the county Environmental Council — maintained that the council had violated the open-meeting law by not properly notifying the public two weeks ago about council consideration of the car dealers' request to change the growth-control ordinance, called Measure O.

No project opponents were at the meeting two weeks ago, but Tuesday about 50 attended.

Some maintained that council members were attempting to railroad through a special election in June to loosen Measure O before it is scheduled to expire in 1990. Unless changed, Measure O would bar the development of the auto plaza on a

portion of a 60-acre site, known as the Kinzli property. The Kinzli family is reportedly selling the property to the three auto dealers.

Opponents said they objected to any changes in Measure O before 1990. Karen Freitas, who lives in a neighborhood near the Kinzli land, submitted petitions to the council with 200 signatures from residents opposed to the rescinding of Measure O.

Kathleen Hodgson, representing a group called "Citizens for Open Space," maintained the car dealers are using "economic blackmail." The car sellers, represented by Nissan/Dodge/Toyota dealer Lee Courtright, two weeks ago told council members they were under corporate pressure to relocate their businesses to larger locations, or they would lose their franchises.

If they cannot go to the Kinzli property, then they will leave the city, taking an estimated \$600,000 in annual sales-tax revenues with them, said Courtright.

Hodgson added, "We don't really believe the car dealers would leave, and leave the market open for some-

one else to move in."

Celia Scott-Von der Muhll, representing Environmental Council and Resource Defense Fund, told council members not to "do a special favor" for the car dealers by setting a special election for the amendment to Measure O, as had been suggested by Courtright.

She said the project should be sent to the planning department, "and not be considered in a non-public manner by a (council) subcommittee."

Council members said there would be plenty of public discussion about the proposal and they would be required to follow lengthy land-use procedures before approving an auto plaza on the Kinzli property. Those

procedures would include an environmental review on the proposed Measure O changes and General Plan amendment; Local Coastal Program amendment; possible review by the Federal Emergency Management program since the property lies in the federally designated floodplain, and Planning Commission review.

Planning Director Peter Katzlberger said it was unrealistic to think requirements could be met in time for a June ballot proposal.

Courtright has said the dealers need to submit preliminary relocation plans by September. Tuesday he invited interested persons to come to his business to discuss the project.

"We're not trying to push any-

thing. We're telling you our concerns and our needs," he said at Tuesday's meeting.

Looking at the audience, Councilman Arnold Levine said, "You and I are part of the problem. In coming to this town, we created the need for more elbow space.

"I'm afraid people will take a stand and be unwilling to discuss any change whatsoever.

"But you've got to look at reality. We can't afford to lose our tax base.

"That doesn't mean we're going to cave in to commercial interests. But, unfortunately, some of us might have to pay a price, by paying more taxes or by having an apartment house next to us."