

Proposed Dentist Office Hits Nerve

By Dan Abbott

A proposed dental office in the midst of a residential neighborhood drew harsh criticism and heated comments at Monday night's planning board meeting.

Dentist Dwight Jennings' plan to turn an unoccupied house he owns at 776 Lincoln Ave. into an orthodontic office has raised the ire of local residents, who submitted a petition protesting the proposal, citing parking issues, and concerns over quality of life and property values.

Local resident Brian Stewart made an impassioned appeal opposing the plan, in which Jennings would add nearly 500 square feet of office space to the single-family home, converting it to a 9-to-5 dental practice that would receive an estimated 25 patients a day.

"It's definitely not OK," Stewart told the board. "Everybody I spoke to was against this. It's not a slam dunk."

Board member Gina Mariani voiced concern, saying the adjacent five-way intersection of Lincoln Avenue, Constitution Way, and 8th Street was already busy, with parking a scarce commodity for residents.

"This is a gigantic event for this neighborhood," Mariani said. "People are already out there (on Lincoln Avenue) fight-

ing for parking day and night."

When Jennings first applied for the use permit to convert the property, every property owner within 300 feet was notified of the plan. On April 14, the Planning and Building Department received a petition from 19 neighbors opposing the dental office.

Jennings said he had spoken to many of these signers since then, and that many had changed their minds. But local resident Peter Cole challenged Jennings to provide evidence of the neighborhood's change of heart.

"I'm afraid this will impact our property values negatively," Cole said. "The only other business (nearby) is Ralph's Market."

Because of the strong opposition the plan has sparked, the planning board staff recommended that a vote be postponed until next meeting, to allow for greater public input. Though several citizens in attendance spoke out against the use permit, the meeting was sparsely attended.

"I'm shocked that more people aren't here," Mariani said.

Mariani also said she worried the use permit would set a precedent for future commercial developments, which she said could "change the entire makeup

of that area."

Board member Patrick Lynch agreed that more debate was needed, questioning some of the petitioners' arguments, such as increased noise and the petition's claim that the property "would be left unattended, creating many more problems." Lynch said he was "a little skeptical" of the plan, but urged both sides to come back on May 8 with "well-reasoned arguments."

Board President Andrew Cunningham insisted on a frank and honest discussion of local concerns.

"If it's just a matter of, 'I don't want to live next to a business,' that's a valid comment," Cunningham said. "But let's just hear it and move on."

Stewart, a 30-year Alameda resident, addressed the board a second time. He urged a long-term view of the neighborhood's fate, explaining that quality of life issues and property values were closely related.

"We have to look down the line," Stewart said. "I worked hard for a residential property. We bought it when was residential. We want to keep it residential."

The issue will be voted on at the next planning board meeting May 8.

Contact Dan Abbott at dabbott@alamedasun.com.

Coast Guard Cutter Sails for Asia

Sun Staff Reports

A U.S. Coast Guard cutter based in Alameda left for Southeast Asia Monday, April 24 to participate in training exercises aimed at increasing maritime security in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

The 378-foot High Endurance cutter Sherman departed this week with a 175-person crew for four months from the Island's West

End to join host countries Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines in Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training, a program for improving security skills.

"The program is an attempt to combat the global maritime terrorism threat," said Petty Officer Amy Thomas, a spokesperson for the Coast Guard's Pacific area, the jurisdictional region composing

the 10 most western U.S. states and 74 million square miles of offshore water.

The Sherman will be participating and leading many of the exercises, which will focus on skills like boarding other ships while at sea and search and rescue techniques, Thomas said.

This is the 12th time the Coast Guard has sent a ship to participate in international exercises.



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