

Fire Station Search On

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Already behind schedule in its search, the city of Los Angeles is eyeing three properties occupied by prominent businesses as possible sites for a new Hollywood Fire Station 82.

Florentine Gardens, Hollywood Billiards and Toyota/Lincoln Mercury of Hollywood are three businesses that sit on parcels the city is looking to use for a new, regional fire station to replace the current Fire Station 82 at 1800 N. Bronson Avenue.

The fire department says the old Station 82, occupying just half-an-acre, is too small to serve the growing area. A planned two-acre regional station would have more fire engines, as well as storage and training areas.

Battalion Chief Roy Prince, speaking last Monday at a meeting organized by the Hollywood United Neighborhood Council, said that each of the three possible sites has disadvantages and that none is a clear-cut favorite. The department takes seriously removing long-established business to make way for the station, he added.

"We know there is going to be an impact no matter where we go," he said. The department is looking to finish building a replacement to the more than 50-year-old station by November, 2007, and it already is 14 months behind schedule.

The city earlier this year came close to acquiring property at the intersection of Garfield Place and Hollywood Boulevard but was forced to abandon the site after activists decried the planned demolition of up to 47 housing units as part of the project.

At last Monday's meeting, each of the businesses argued against using its land for the new station. Doing so would rob the area of their valuable contributions and put fire trucks amidst a high-traffic area, they said.

One of the three sites would involve the acquisition of land stretching from the north-bound, 101 Freeway off-ramp at Hollywood Boulevard to a Mobil gas station at 5700 Hollywood Boulevard. That area includes Hollywood Billiards at 5750 Hollywood Boulevard, as well as an auto repair shop.

The area also includes two unoccupied buildings that a developer plans to turn into housing, Prince said.

Jeff Bey, owner of Hollywood Billiards, says he doesn't plan on selling his property to

the city. He argued at the meeting that his business should be kept open because it boosts public safety, raises money for charity and attracts big corporate clients. "We were the first people to bring in Fortune 500 companies and studios to spend money in Hollywood," he said.

The business raises money for Aids Project Los Angeles and fallen police officers, Bey added.

"We've had a 15-year commitment to the community ... And we would like to remain in the community," he said.

The second site being eyed is made up of four parcels, including three now used by the Toyota dealership and one occupied by a two-story building.

The 6000 Hollywood Boulevard Toyota dealership, the first in the nation when it opened in 1959, also is opposed to selling the property. The dealership contributes millions of tax dollars to the city and employs 152 people supporting 600 family members, argued co-owner John Sullivan.

"We're talking about 600 people's livelihood kind of being possibly wiped out," he said. But the decision not to sell isn't Toyota's alone. The dealership is leasing each of its parcels from different property owners, two of whom have indicated they are willing to negotiate, Prince said.

One of those willing owners also owns the Florentine Gardens, a 65-year-old nightclub that was a popular World War II servicemen's hangout and the site of Marilyn Monroe and Jim Dougherty's wedding reception in 1942.

The 5955 Hollywood Boulevard nightclub argued that the new station should be placed east of the 101 Freeway, because the western section of Hollywood Boulevard often is jammed with traffic.

"(East of the 101) is the best place to save human lives," said Wes Connelly, the nightclub's representative.

But many residents at the meeting said the nightclub would make a better Fire Station 82 site than Toyota or Hollywood Billiards. A majority of the Hollywood United Neighborhood Council's board members present voted the nightclub's property as the best option among the three sites being looked at.

Steven Whiddon, who is helping to form a new neighborhood council in the area, says the nightclub doesn't contribute as much to the community as Toyota and Hollywood Billiards. Florentine Gardens is open only Fridays and Saturdays, while Toyota and Hollywood Billiards are open all week.

“The space isn’t being completely utilized,” he said.