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Upscale hotel could displace ice cream shop, homes

By [DEEPA BHARATH](#)

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GARDEN GROVE – The city is moving ahead with plans to relocate a popular mom-and-pop ice cream shop, a nail salon, cigarette shop and several residents from Harbor Boulevard to make way for an upscale 700-room hotel with an emphasis on conferences and conventions, officials said.

According to staff reports, the proposed hotel would include 50,000 square feet of conference space, 15,000 square feet of restaurant space, a parking structure and a resort pool.

Joe's Italian Ice, which has served up gelato and soft-serve ice cream for the last 10 years, would have to move by the end of the year if the plans are approved. Owner Mike Abeyta, who opened the shop in 2002, said he spent \$150,000 to renovate the former beeper store.

"At the time, the city told me that as long as I brought in business to the city and improved the city, I could be here," he said. "I've grown my business over the years and we're very popular. But I'm still being told I have to leave."

The hotel project is expected to displace six homes and four businesses at Harbor and Twintree.

City Manager Matthew Fertal said the city doesn't yet have a brand for the hotel, but expects it to be a "full-size convention hotel."

"It would be similar to a Hyatt," he said.

Although the details of the project are not yet in place, the approval process requires the city to first come up with a relocation plan, Fertal said. The relocation plan for the businesses and residents is expected to come before the council for approval next month.

City officials consider the [cluster of nine hotels on Harbor Boulevard](#) just south of Disneyland to be their biggest redevelopment success story. The hotels, particularly, bring in 15 percent to 20 percent of the city's revenue – about \$12 million annually, according to city reports. Just down the street on the Harbor Corridor, plans are underway for a [600-room water park hotel resort](#).

Fertal says the ground breaking for the new hotel project, provided everything goes according to schedule, could happen as early as next year.

Many of the residents on Twintree facing relocation are renters. Cathy Mitchell says she moved with her husband and two young children from Sun Valley in October because her old neighborhood was unsafe.

"We like it here," she said. "The neighborhood is quieter and safer and the school district is great. My kids are comfortable here. We don't want to move."

Mitchell said she and her husband spent \$6,000 after they moved to fix up the place.

According to the [relocation plan](#), posted on the city's web site, renters may be entitled to rental or down-payment assistance not to exceed \$5,250 provided they meet certain eligibility requirements such as having lived in the home for at least 90 days. The total estimated budget for the relocation-related payments for this project is \$497,000. The specific details for relocating the business were not available.

Aziz Ali, who owns Safari Tobacco next to Crystal Nail Salon on Harbor, says his store has been there since 1999.

"I like to be on Harbor Boulevard," he said. "If I move, my business is surely going to get affected."

Susan Tchir rents one of the homes the city plans to relocate on Twintree and works part-time at Abeyta's ice cream shop. The move would be devastating for her because both her home and her livelihood hang in the balance, she says.

"What bothers me the most is there is no stamped guarantee that we will be relocated," she said. "I've put my own money to fix up this house and make it my home. If I lose my job at the ice cream store, how am I going to pay my rent?"

Tchir said she has been told she cannot be helped if she moves now, but she has not received a promise that she will be helped.

"We are living in a state of uncertainty now," she said, getting emotional. "Why do they need one more hotel when they have so many just a few feet away? I just don't get it."

Fertal said the city is still in the process of negotiating with the property owners in the area.

"Right now there is no question of eminent domain," he said. "We are not even talking about it. We are hoping that we can reach an agreement."

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