

Gardena Delays Vote on Galaxy Mall Project

By ADRIANNE GOODMAN, *Times Staff Writer*

After six hours of testimony from residents that included a recall threat, the Gardena City Council ended a sometimes raucous hearing Tuesday by postponing a vote on the proposed Galaxy Mall.

Council members said they needed another month to meet with residents and consider the impact of the project on the neighborhood.

Since its unveiling last May, the 190,000-square-foot mall, proposed for the 7-acre site of a former nursery on Redondo Beach Boulevard near Van Ness Avenue, has raised residents' concerns that crime and traffic will increase and property values will decrease if the project is approved.

Last month, the Planning Commission deadlocked 2 to 2 on the mall proposal, in effect denying approval and passing the final decision on to the City Council.

'Rabbit Hutch'

During the hearing at Tuesday's council meeting, more than two dozen residents spoke against the project, calling it "a pregnant mini-mall" and "a rabbit-hutch type of development."

"We're going to deliberately create a slum in a business area," said resident Ken Gossett. "How many nail shops can we have? How many trinket shops can we have?"

Resident Joanne Shaler said residents "are prepared to go to recall" against City Council members if the project is approved.

In defense of the project, former Gardena Mayor Edmond J. Russ, a spokesman for developer Mike Su of Rancho Palos Verdes, said tenants in the 480-shop mall would be able to buy their own shops rather than lease them, creating pride of ownership.

Shops in the mall, ranging from 180 to 2,500 square feet, would sell

for \$80,000 to \$100,000, Russ said. The design of the mall would be similar to that of the Fashion Island mall in Newport Beach.

At times, the focus of the hearing shifted from public concern over the impact of the mall to a shouting match between Torrance City Councilman Dan Walker and Gardena City Councilman Mas Fukai over what Walker called a possible conflict of interest for Fukai.

Walker said Fukai should refrain from voting on the project because his son Rick, a real estate broker, sold the \$8-million parcel of land to developer Su.

Walker, one of the most vocal opponents of the project, is a consultant for Pioneer Theaters, owners of the Radium Open Air Market, a swap meet across the street from the proposed mall.

Fukai accused Walker of threatening to organize a recall effort against several Gardena council members if they approve the project, an accusation that Walker denied.

'Classic Conflict'

Walker presented a 10-page letter to the council from Pioneer Theaters saying Fukai's vote would be a "classic conflict of interest [between] the undivided loyalty Councilman Fukai owes to the city and a father's desire to help his son succeed in his profession."

Fukai denied any conflict. "If there was any conflict at all, I would be the first one to say it," he said. "If I should not help my son or my friends, I do not belong here."

City Atty. Michael Karger said at the hearing that there is no legal conflict of interest for Fukai because his son is not a dependent and Fukai stands to gain no financial benefit from the project.

The council scheduled a vote on the project for its Sept. 13 meeting.