

## Zoning shifts pave way for change in Hanford

Published on 08/31/2015 - 12:16 pm

Written by Hannah Esqueda

0 Comments



Dedication Tattoo & Art Gallery owner Chad Rees (left) talks shop with tattoo artist Billy “the Kid” Patalsky. Rees’s shop is one of several tattoo and body piercing businesses located in small towns neighboring Hanford. He said many of his customers are Hanford residents and thinks the city should allow the industry in. The City of Hanford is on the cusp of change as officials are taking steps to ease long-standing zoning laws limiting specific business development in the downtown area.

For more than a decade, the city’s general plan has prohibited certain industries from opening outside the downtown district, including banks, optometrists, hotels, movie theaters and even furniture stores. That’s set to change, however, as the city council recently approved a resolution allowing for the development of hotels beyond the historic zone.

The move will allow the city’s existing motels to add additional features like meeting rooms, lobbies, room service and small appliances, while also clearing the way for the future development of hotels outside the city’s downtown corridor.

“That was a huge thing for downtown,” said Shelly Talbert, executive director of Main Street Hanford.

The nonprofit works with hundreds of local businesses to promote and revitalize the city’s business improvement district, including the downtown area. Talbert said the organization is concerned by some of the city council’s recent moves to change the downtown zoning laws.

“They set these ordinances in place [in the 2002 general plan] to protect the downtown and keep it vital,” she said. “If

you want to keep your downtown as the heart of your city, you have to take care of and support it.”

In addition to opening the rest of Hanford to hotel developers, the council has also given initial approval to change commercial zoning laws for movie theaters.

Darlene Mata, Hanford’s community development director, said the revised law would address a unique situation with Cinemark Movies 8. The facility is currently the city’s only movie theater and is located inside the Hanford Mall, outside of downtown.

“The existing theater is nonconforming and was grandfathered in when the initial restriction was passed,” she said.

The movie theater ordinance is expected to be finalized next week by the city council, and would allow the theater to expand or upgrade its facility. However, the change also opens the door to new theaters being developed near Lacey Boulevard and Avenue 12 as well as the Costco project near Highways 43 and 198. .

Located at the edges of town, the two areas are set to become commercial zones as a result of the city’s new general plan update. The shopping centers have already attracted several big-box stores and have downtown advocates concerned about future development.

The movie theater resolution makes the downtown area less competitive for future theater development at a time when the district could greatly benefit, Talbert said.

“We would love to have a multiscreen theater to help increase the walkability and foot traffic for our restaurants. It would really boost the night-life for the tenants at some of the new loft apartments in downtown,” she said.

In order to help keep the business zones even, Mata said the city has initiated a review of its stance on tattoo and body piercing shops. The businesses are currently banned from city limits but are being considered for the downtown area.

While Mata said the ban has traditionally been a result of tattoo shop owners not following state health codes closely enough, area business owners disagree and claim city leaders hold unfairly negative views of the industry.

“I’ve had a lot of frustrations with Hanford itself and the city thinking [tattoo shops] are a bad element,” said Chad Rees, owner of Dedication Tattoo & Art Gallery. “The only zones for us are all in industrial [unincorporated] areas and not a lot of people are going to feel safe or want to come out there.”

He opened his shop in Armona earlier this summer, making it one of several tattoo parlors located on the outskirts of Hanford. The business offers custom tattoo and body piercings and features a gallery of original oil paintings done by Rees.

While the community of Armona has been supportive of his business, Rees said he would consider opening a second location in Hanford if the city lifted its current ban.

“Everyone’s going to be excited about it if it happens. Hanford is a nice little town and we have a lot of clients who come from there,” he said.

The ban lift appears to also be supported by many residents, and Talbert said Main Street Hanford received a lot of positive responses when it polled its followers on the issue over Facebook earlier this month. The post received dozens of comments, the majority of which were in support of letting the tattoo industry within city limits since it would help boost the local art scene.

Opening the downtown area to new businesses also makes financial sense since it would help breathe new life into the local economy and attract more people to the district, Rees said.

Talbert agreed and said she hopes the city will consider the impact future zoning changes will have on the downtown area.

“I understand that things may need to change after so many years but we want to see new things come in as well,” she said. “Most of us want to work on infill and keeping downtown vital and all the new growth is against that.”

[inShare](#)