

Body shops, recharge zone a bad mix?

Council vote likely to keep the facilities off of sensitive area.

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The San Antonio City Council is expected to reject a controversial proposal today that would open the door for auto body and repair shops in the Edwards Aquifer's recharge zone.

Ken Brown, an attorney and lobbyist representing Gunn Honda, a dealership that had wanted to relocate to the recharge zone, said he expects council members will reject the proposal.

"They will shoot it down," said Brown, who believes that the measure would have few supporters at the council meeting. "There's no sense in going and getting kicked in the groin. It's a loss. You can't win that one."

The proposed change to the city's unified development code would allow an auto dealership on the recharge zone to also have auto body and auto repair operations if it receives special approval from the council.

A now-defunct advisory committee recommended the change. The San Antonio Water System and the Zoning

Commission oppose it.

Richard Alles, a member of Aquifer Guardians in Urban Areas, a local environmental group, said hazardous chemicals stored and used at such facilities would threaten the aquifer.

Granting auto dealerships an avenue to operate such facilities on the recharge zone would set a bad precedent that might end up allowing stand-alone auto body and repair shops in the environmentally sensitive area, Alles said.

"If these auto dealers are allowed to operate paint and body shops, then the independent operators will rightfully be able to complain that they should be allowed the same right," Alles said.

Brown said that if the city does not change its rules to accommodate auto dealerships, they likely instead would build elsewhere in the recharge zone outside city limits or anywhere in the aquifer's contributing zone.

The recharge zone is where surface water enters directly into the aquifer through caves, sinkholes and other openings. The contributing zone is where rivers and creeks collect rainfall and runoff that flow into the recharge zone and feed the aquifer.

Scientists say both zones are essential to the aquifer, San Antonio's primary source

of drinking water.

Last year, Gunn Honda opted to relocate to another area known as the contributing zone within the transition zone. Pollutants in this area

can enter the aquifer directly through openings at the site or indirectly as runoff carried into the recharge zone.

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