

Santa Maria receives two more appeals over ICE permit

CITY COUNCIL WILL DISCUSS ALL FOUR AT SPECIAL MEETING MARCH 12

February 27, 2014 • [Ben Miller/bmiller@santamariatimes.com](mailto:Ben.Miller@santamariatimes.com)

Two more parties have appealed the Planning Commission's approval of a permit for a controversial Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in Santa Maria, bringing the final number to four at the close of the appeal period Wednesday.

The latest appeals are from the San Francisco-based organization [Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement](#). The fourth was filed today by Santa Maria resident Scott Fina.

Both argued that the facility would be detrimental to the health, safety, morale and welfare of people in the neighborhood. The CIVIC document specified that the facility would harm property values of homes nearby, while Fina argued that the zoning of the property — commercial/professional office — was inappropriate for a facility that includes holding cells for criminals.

CIVIC's appeal warned that the fear community members would feel because of ICE's presence could affect relations with the city's government.

"Approving the permit for ICE will erode the City Council's and the mayor's trust and credibility in the community," the document states. "If the city of Santa Maria is seen as an extension of ICE, people are less likely to report crime or to serve as witnesses."

The ICE office would be able to hold 13 detainees for up to 12 hours each, according to ICE officials, and the majority of the building would be used as office space for about a dozen employees who currently work out of trailers at the federal penitentiary in Lompoc. Fina said that because the bureau is currently unable to bring detainees inside the grounds at their current facility, the presence of holding cells at the Santa Maria office would change the nature of the operation.

"The fact that the greater portion of the space of the planned new ICE facility is offices rather than detention cells misses the point from a functional perspective," Fina wrote in his appeal. "Moreover, the activities to be undertaken in these offices are mostly in support of the arrest and detention of undocumented aliens with criminal backgrounds, which are the core activities of ICE-(Enforcement and Removal Operations). These core activities are clearly inconsistent with the characteristics of the 'Commercial/Professional Office' land use."

Community Development Director Larry Appel said the zoning is appropriate for the usage. "It's private land owned by a private person and he is building a private commercial building," Appel said. "It's just that he's leasing it to an agency of the federal government."

The City Council will discuss both appeals, along with the two previous ones, at a special meeting at the Santa Maria Fairpark on March 12. The meeting, which will likely take place after 5 p.m., will include audio amplifiers outside the building so people who can't get in can listen and multiple translators to accommodate Spanish speakers. For discussion purposes, the agenda could group together similar concerns between the appeals as their own action items, Appel said.

At a Feb. 5 Planning Commission meeting at the Fairpark, one translator began interpreting statements after the meeting began and the time taken to restate comments limited the amount of public input people could give.

"We thought it was too onerous on the last individual, so we're going to get more than one translator," Haydon said.

A crowd of people listened to the meeting outside the building, unable to make it in because the room was filled to capacity.

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