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Grocery store zoning divides Tybee Council

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Everyone expected the Tybee Market zoning requests to lead to a grueling night at Thursday's Tybee Island City Council meeting.

That's what it turned into - and more. During two hours of debate, tension ran high. Some people were near tears. Councilman Eddie Crone walked out once. And resident Jimmy Brown began his presentation with onetime rock star Joni Mitchell in the background singing: "They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

The debate: Whether the IGA - the island's only grocery store - should be allowed to change its zoning and the zoning for two adjoining lots, which would allow the store to add 16 parking spaces and widen the spaces in the existing parking lot.

The problem: The store is grandfathered in as a non-conforming use, surrounded by residential neighbors long bothered by morning deliveries, noisy traffic and unwanted trash.

Residents worry, too, that once the rezoning was granted, it would forever become commercial zoning and would hurt their property values.

"I'm so upset, I had to put a nitroglycerin under my tongue," neighbor Gerry Hollingsworth told the council. "I don't want to look at that nightmare."

After concerns about whether all the zoning requests were properly advertised, the council agreed to table the motion. It will come up again in August to allow time for the legally required advertising.

The city's Planning Commission approved conditional zoning on a 3-2 vote. The zoning limits uses to a gift shop, grocery store, retail store, professional and business office or a parking lot.

Attorney Walter Hartridge, who represents the neighbors, advised the council he believes that allowing

the zoning change would constitute illegal, unconstitutional spot zoning. City attorney Bubba Hughes believes it would not because it was an expansion of an existing, non-conforming use.

The store at times attracts so many shoppers that traffic backs up onto Butler Avenue, and store employees have to help direct vehicles in and out of the lot.

"It seems like common sense," said Jim Stone, a design consultant for the store. "I can't believe we're here tonight."

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