



CRAIG CURTISS—Staff

Newark springs auto mall surprise

More dealerships may pull business from Fremont's anemic effort

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NEWARK — While Fremont's Auto Mall is stuck in neutral, Newark is speeding ahead with a plan of its own.

During the City Council meeting Thursday Newark Mayor David Smith hinted that a "Newark Auto Mall" may be taking shape with the expansion of Fremont Ford.

Smith made his comments after the council approved the expansion of Fremont Ford. The dealership plans to add an additional building.

Fremont Ford owner Dee Barnes attended the meeting and told the council he intended to bring a new dealership into the new building, but was "not at liberty to say" who it would be.

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Barnes told the council it would not be another Ford dealership, but "that it just wasn't time yet" to disclose the name of the new dealership.

Smith, along with a number of Newark city officials said they did not know the name of the franchise. An auto mall in Newark would mean additional sales tax revenue for the city, which is financially strapped because of the recession.

Barnes added that he eventually planned to move his Pontiac, GMC, Oldmobile dealerships now located in Fremont onto 4.5 acres of land on the other side of John Muir Drive near the Fremont/Newark Hilton.

If Barnes is successful that would mean five dealerships set up in three buildings, more than the Fremont Auto Mall has been able to muster to date.

The Fremont Auto Mall is planned for 88 acres off the former Durham Road, west of Interstate 880. So far, only 45 acres have been sold to car dealers, and two of them are currently building

new showrooms. Barnes said he would not name the franchise until mid-1993 — when the new building is expected to be completed. Barnes said he would soon be submitting plans for developing the 4.5 acres across from his dealership.

When asked whether the franchise was connected to Pierotti Motors, Barnes said no, but there is some speculation another dealership set to move into the Fremont Auto Mall is involved.

In June, Pierotti Motors, the lone dealership settled at the Fremont mall, closed its doors, shocking the city and casting doubts of the future of the project.

In an interview Friday, Smith said he made his remarks somewhat "tongue and cheek" but added that Newark is an "outstanding location for auto dealerships" because of the traffic generated by NewPark Mall and the Nimitz Freeway.

Smith said the problems at the auto mall are no secret and that dealerships might well look into Newark where visibility is better, despite higher land prices.

Fremont City officials could not be reached for comment.

This is not the first time Fremont and Newark have tangled

over business. NewPark Mall and Fremont Ford are examples of two projects Newark managed to lure away from Fremont.

But auto dealers involved in the Fremont Auto Mall disagree and argue that it's in their best interest to stick together.

Don Signer, owner of Signer Cadillac, said he was unaware of any new dealerships bailing out on the auto mall and added it would be "counterproductive if the dealers split up" because two auto malls would divide customers.

"It doesn't make economic sense," Signer said, adding that Newark didn't have the space to

build an auto mall the size of Fremont's.

Mark Hamilton, owner of Fremont Lincoln Mercury said he too knew nothing about Barnes' plans for expansion, but agreed with Signer that two auto malls would serve no one.

Hamilton also said he was confident the auto mall project would be successful.

Smith acknowledged that Newark "could never have an auto mall that size," but seemed confident Fremont Ford's expansion could mean good things for the city.

"We've got the best location," Smith said.

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