

Panel denies tow company's expansion plan

By Elizabeth Kim
STAFF WRITER

STAMFORD — East Coast Towing, which calls the city its biggest customer, is clashing with officials over its efforts to expand to a third site.

Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals voted unanimously last week to deny a bid by East Coast Towing, which has locations in Waterside and the East Side, to obtain a used car dealership license at 86 Elmcroft Road. East Coast Towing, one of the city's largest tow companies, has been in business for more than 30 years.

At a public hearing before the zoning appeals board, owner Joseph Romaniello told board members he does not intend to operate a used car dealership at the Elmcroft location but needs the license to repair and store vehicles. Romaniello can appeal the decision.

According to state law, a used car dealer license is required for places that sell, store and repair used cars.

"I would call it a satellite shop," Romaniello

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He said. "If I wanted to do repairs when the other sites were tied up."

He said he occasionally fixes abandoned cars and sells them to salvage yards. Without the license, Romaniello could face a Class B misdemeanor for repairing or selling the cars, according to his attorney, Joseph Capalbo.

Board member Georgiana White expressed confusion over the application.

"To me, a used car dealership license means you want to be involved in selling used cars," White said. "I feel like we are giving him permission for something we do not want

to see happen here."

More than a dozen people showed up Wednesday to protest the application, including representatives from Pitney Bowes. The company is next to the proposed site.

Jane Freeman, an attorney for Pitney Bowes, argued that parking at the Elmcroft site would spill onto the streets. She submitted recent photographs of tow trucks parked along Taff Avenue, near the company's Waterside location.

"The city has had a continuous problem at this location," she said. "You are going to transfer one existing problem in one part of the city to another."

In 2003, the city sued Ro-

maniello for illegally storing vehicles at two residential lots he owned in Waterside. Residents complained that tow trucks were often parked on Taff Avenue and surrounding streets.

The issue was resolved after Romaniello agreed to park no more than six tow trucks on Taff Avenue and pay a \$2,500 fine.

Romaniello assured board members there would be no on-street parking at the Elmcroft site.

South End residents said they were not convinced.

"What you are looking at is a duplicate of their other locations," said Terry Adams, vice president of the South End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone.

Adams and other residents said the business would undermine the evolving image of the South End, which is undergoing an estimated \$3 billion redevelopment.

"We've waited so long for redevelopment in the area," said Sue Halpern, who lives on Elmcroft.

Capalbo responded that the neighborhood is zoned for

intensive industrial and commercial uses.

"This is not the intent for that zone," ZBA Chairwoman Claire Friedlander said. "If we want to put any teeth into the South End development, we have to deny this."

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