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### **Council approves hotel rezoning**

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Oak Ridge City Council members on Monday voted 4-3 to approve a rezoning request that could allow a three-story hotel on South Illinois Avenue.

The 68-room Holiday Inn Express and Suites, on about 1.57 acres next to TNBank and Potomac Circle, has been proposed by hotel owner and developer Shailesh Patel.

The rezoning request could be considered on second and final reading at Council's Sept. 24 meeting.

Even if approved then, though, the project would still face additional review by city officials.

Monday evening's vote followed a roughly 40-minute public hearing, during which a dozen Oak Ridge residents spoke. Most were from the Woodland neighborhood and most opposed the hotel.

Residents expressed a variety of concerns, including the potential for increased traffic, noise and security problems, as well as the hotel's proximity to nearby homes.

"We are still against it," Woodland resident Mary Henderson said.

The City Council last September rejected plans for a larger, five-story version of the hotel that residents had opposed, organizing a petition drive against it.

Residents say they are worried that the hotel could trigger further development along South Illinois Avenue in Woodland, replacing affordable, single-family homes with businesses.

"I'm opposed to any commercial encroachment ... into my neighborhood," former Oak Ridge Mayor Jerry Kuhaida said.

Two Woodland property owners spoke in favor of the hotel.

"I believe he's a man of high character, and I believe he'll run a reputable business," said Woodland resident Mike Eldridge, referring to Patel and the potential for new jobs and tax revenues.

Oak Ridge Mayor Tom Beehan voted for the hotel rezoning, as did Council members Tom Hayes, Charlie Hensley and Jane Miller. Voting against it were Ellen Smith, Willie Golden and David Mosby.

Some officials and business owners say more commercial development along South Illinois Avenue is inevitable, given the corridor's high traffic count and location at Oak Ridge's southern entrance.

Following the City Council vote last September, Oak Ridge officials put together a South Illinois Avenue corridor study that tries to bridge the gap between developers and residents. Among other things, the study looks at potential 20-year changes along South Illinois Avenue from Rutgers Avenue to Lafayette Drive, and calls for some possible development restrictions.

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