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**Section:** News

### **New hotel OK'd**

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The opposition grew more intense, but the votes stayed the same on a controversial rezoning that could allow a three-story hotel on South Illinois Avenue in Woodland.

Oak Ridge City Council members approved the rezoning in a 4-3 vote on second and final reading Monday night.

The vote followed a public-comment period that lasted about an hour.

Council had already approved the rezoning on first reading in a 4-3 vote on Aug. 20.

The rezoning could allow hotel owner and developer Shailesh Patel to build a Holiday Inn Express Hotel and Suites on 1.57 acres next to TnBank on Potomac Circle. The project could break ground next spring, Patel said.

Two dozen speakers opposed the hotel on Monday, and four supported it.

Opponents of the hotel cast a wide net of objections. They said democracy is breaking down and the city is ignoring zoning rules, quality-of-life considerations and the Woodland neighborhood's historic character.

Generally, opponents of the hotel have said they don't want additional commercial development in their neighborhood, citing a potential for reduced property values and increased traffic and noise, among other things.

"We want to keep our neighborhood the way it is," one Woodland resident said.

But those who spoke in favor of the hotel praised Patel's project design and his efforts to work with the community. They also said Illinois Avenue is already developed.

Council members who supported the hotel said some development could benefit Woodland and combat an impression that Oak Ridge is anti-development.

"We're becoming known all over this region as a city you can't do business with," Oak Ridge Mayor Pro Tem Jane Miller said. "Oak Ridge has to quit saying 'no.' We need some new tax base in here."

Miller voted for the hotel rezoning, as did Oak Ridge Mayor Tom Beehan and Council members Charlie Hensley and Tom Hayes.

Meanwhile, Oak Ridge City Council members Ellen Smith, Willie Golden and David Mosby voted against the rezoning.

The proposed hotel project has been around for a while. A larger, five-story version of the hotel was rejected by council members last September.

Following that vote, Oak Ridge officials drafted and adopted a controversial South Illinois Avenue Corridor Study that is meant to guide future commercial development along the high-traffic roadway.

Woodland residents said they're not sure what will happen next.

“We will consider all options to defeat this,” said Rex McNutt, president of Coalition for Neighborhood Rights, a group formed to oppose the hotel rezoning.

The group has said they might pursue a recall of council members or a legal injunction to block the hotel development, although McNutt said after Monday’s meeting that the committee will have to meet and discuss what to do next.

Patel and his project team said they still want to be sensitive to neighborhood issues and work with the Woodland residents.

“We’d still love to work with them,” Patel said. “Votes are one thing. Winning their hearts is another.”

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