

## **Ikedas fruit stand seeks to expand**

By Jonathan Edwards

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Enterprise staff writer

Ikedas, the produce shack on Mace Boulevard, could turn into a high-end grocery, bakery and burger joint in the next couple of years, according to its owner.

The possible redevelopment of Ikedas California Country Market would remake the 800- to 900 square-foot space into something akin to the family's original store in Auburn. Opened in the 1970s, the 10,000-square-foot operation is a fruit store, bakery, fast-food "burger bar" and a high-end grocery carrying meat, fish, chicken, beef, premium wines and microbrews.

Making the Davis site like the one in Auburn was the goal when the family opened the stand about eight years ago, said Glen Ikeda, who owns the stores with his brother, Steve.

Ikeda said he wants to build it into a bona-fide grocery store and restaurant with bathrooms and a paved parking to replace the gravel lot. "We're embarrassed that we can't improve it."

Zoning stands in his way. The five-acre property is zoned agriculture, which prohibits Ikeda's goals of opening a second "burger bar," a fast-food hamburger restaurant.

The agricultural designation is misleading, Ikeda said, because the property is useless for farming, Ikeda said. The five acres are cut off from the farmland to the north by County Road 32A, too close to the Interstate 80 to spray pesticides and cut off from irrigation, Ikeda said.

"You can't do anything with it. It's just a fallow piece of property."

So he's floated the idea of the redevelopment with Yolo County, which brought the idea to the city of Davis at their joint meeting on Friday.

The expansion would need the approval of both government agencies. The land is outside Davis limits, but falls within the city's "sphere of influence," meaning the area is expected to be a part of its growth over the next 20 years.

According to a 1987 agreement between the city and county, Davis essentially pays for the right to control land-use decisions. The county can still push ahead with a project, but it would forfeit the money.

City approval is not a sure thing. At Friday's meeting, Council member Sue Greenwald said she worried a new burger place would take business away from similar fast-food restaurants already in the city, along with sales tax revenue destined for Davis coffers.

"It could really be a huge blow to us," Greenwald said. "It's the first thing they hit when they're hungry and come across the Bypass.

"If they're hungry, we'd like them to be eating at In-N-Out."

Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis challenged the idea, saying there are virtually no businesses to compete with in East Davis. "There isn't much there. There isn't even much of a coffee shop in that part of town."

A freeway-side restaurant could draw customers into other businesses as well. Travelers who've just eaten may also fill up at the nearby Arco gas station, Provenza said, or even duck into Target.

"It could be multifaceted."

Friday's meeting then turned into a debate over the Hyatt Place hotel, which opened in March on the UC Davis campus, which sits on county land. The hotel is "siphoning off business from our downtown" hotels and motels along with sales tax from the city, Greenwald said.

"We didn't build that," Provenza replied.

County officials suggested the idea of sharing the sales tax from the property with the city, but Greenwald was undeterred. Provenza also suggested looking at the Auburn store in two ways to get a feel for what's on the table. He proposed a field trip, and said officials should peek at the sales tax numbers, since both places would draw from much the same crowd — Bay Area tourists heading up to Lake Tahoe or commuters heading to and from home.

The county just wants more information, he added. Just because they're studying the effects the project would have, it doesn't mean they have to sign off on it. "Let's work together and take a look at it," Provenza said. "I may decide this is a bad idea, too, and I'm open to that.

"If at the end of this, the city doesn't want to do this, then we won't do it."

Councilman Stephen Souza said he shared some of Greenwald's concerns, but agreed with Provenza and county Supervisor Helen Thomson about the study. "I just think it's worth looking at the numbers."

The group voted 3-1 to have the county and city team up to study the pluses and minuses the project would have on surrounding businesses and government coffers. It was a step toward “making decisions on actual numbers,” Thomson said.

Greenwald dissented, saying the potential hurt that would be felt by other businesses and the city can't be studied. “These are not quantifiable results,” she said. “I don't want to pretend we think it is.”

The project would benefit everyone — the owners, the county and the city and residents, Ikeda said. “It would be a win-win. We can create more business; the county and the city can derive revenue from this property.”

Switching the zoning could open the door for something less desirable, said Ken Hiatt, deputy city manager of Davis. If Ikeda's goes out of business, another restaurant could slip in, one that's less desirable.

“McDonald's could move in,” Greenwald said. “You can't say, 'No chains.' You can only say, 'Restaurants,' ” she told her colleagues. “You can't make it specific to a desirable user.”

Ikeda doesn't see himself going belly up, but recognizes that no businessman ever does when starting a new venture.

Ikeda sees his five acres as a future place for a complex where some four businesses could open to create “a really unique development.” Maybe a small nursery, a couple or three restaurants — “make it what the Nut Tree could've been.”

He's also realistic to the possibility his venture might fail, and he wants an out. Ikeda doesn't think it will be necessary, but if he does bust, he wants to be able to lease his land to a developer, who might turn it into what the Nut Tree area is today — “a nice mall.”

— Reach Jonathan Edwards at [jedwards@davisenterprise.net](mailto:jedwards@davisenterprise.net) or (530) 747-8052.  
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