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## San Jose council limits bail bonds agencies

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A divided San Jose City Council voted Tuesday night to approve limits on bail bonds agencies after residents who live near the main county jail complained about too many setting up shop.

The council's 7-4 vote means bail agencies operating 24 hours in the jail area will require a conditional use permit. Those located elsewhere in the city would require a permit for 24-hour use if they receive customers in person.

The restrictions also will enforce what city officials say are long-standing rules limiting bail agencies to certain commercial zones but not those for office uses, a move that will likely require many to move or seek zoning changes. New bail agencies in the jail area must be 200 feet from each other as well as from homes, parks and schools.

Councilman Sam Liccardo, who represents the jail area and downtown, was joined by council members Rose Herrera, Kansen Chu and Nancy Pyle in recommending limits on the number of bail agencies than those recommended by city planning staff. He called the proliferation of bail bonds agencies in his district "extraordinary."

"Clearly, something has happened," Liccardo said, "that's created a boom here that's had some real impacts on quality of life."

But with the council divided, Liccardo agreed to shrink the required separation from bail agencies, homes, parks and schools from the 300 foot limit he had proposed, as well as to eliminate a prohibition against new bail agencies occupying

ground-floor space in the jail area.

Council members Pete Constant, Xavier Campos, Don Rocha and Madison Nguyen were opposed.

Constant said the proposal would effectively make bondsmen hostage to a handful of landlords whose properties would allow them. He added that there's been little evidence of nuisance problems associated with bail bonds agencies to justify the restrictions.

"We're taking action based on blight, severe impacts when no evidence," Constant said. Residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the Santa Clara County main jail complained that in the last few years bail bonds agencies have seemingly taken over, leaving little room for cafes, markets and other retail businesses.

Beyond that, they say the proliferation of bail bonds businesses has made their neighborhoods feel seedy, eroding property values.

"Now it's just bail bonds everywhere," said Patty Phillips, who lives in the Horace Mann neighborhood downtown.

Bondsmen countered that bail bonds agencies belong near jails and that the proposed limits will unfairly penalize legitimate businesses whose hard-luck clients benefit from vigorous competition that keeps rates in check.

Jose Luna of Luna Bail Bonds said the proposed rules would force him to move his business, putting him at a competitive disadvantage and possibly forcing him to lay off some of his six employees.

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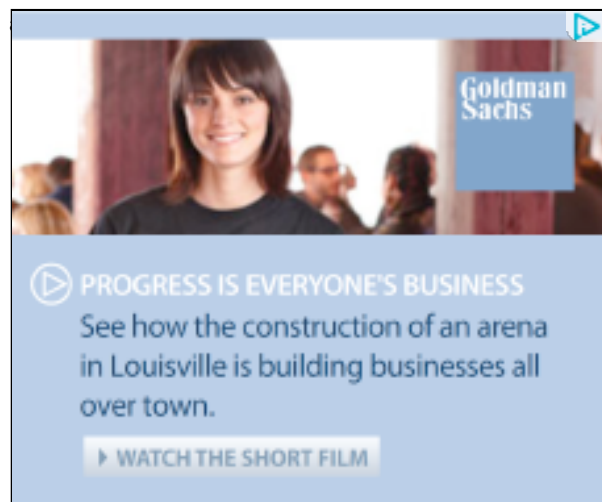
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"You're going to wipe out the competition and choices for people facing bad times," Luna said.



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