

U-Haul business driven out of Penticton residential neighbourhood

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Despite a passionate plea from a convenience store operator, Penticton city council decided a residential neighbourhood wasn't the right location for a rental vehicle franchise.

Sherlock Oh owns and operates The Rocky Store on the corner of Johnson and Haven Hill Roads. In late January, he started operating a U-Haul rental business with trucks, trailers and a cube van parked on the property.

After complaints from neighbours and a visit from Penticton bylaw officers, who found that the U-Haul franchise was a non-conforming use, Oh applied to the city for a zoning amendment, which council allowed to go to a public hearing on March 21.

Oh began his argument by trying to atone for any negative feelings generated by his operation, bowing deeply to the audience attending the city council meeting in apology. He then told council he was having a hard time making ends meet with the convenience store, and adding the U-Haul franchise was necessary to stay afloat.

“If I cannot do this, I will have to sell business and move out,” said Oh.

There was no shortage of either support or opposition to the U-Haul operation. Oh himself presented council with a 106-signature petition in support of his being allowed to continue the rental business.

Others came to the microphone to attest to Oh’s good character and dedication to his business. But many neighbours also came forward with their concerns about the unsightliness of the vehicles as well as safety concerns.

One neighbour, Marie Houston, expressed her concerns about the seniors in the Haven Hill Retirement Centre.

“We see almost daily, seniors struggling to get across the street with their walkers or their canes. It is so dangerous for them,” said Houston, adding that the U-Haul trucks pulling in and out added to her concerns.

Dennis Gorman, another nearby neighbour, said the discussion shouldn’t be about Oh’s good character or how hard he worked, but the appropriateness of a U-Haul business in the area.

Oh finished up the public hearing with another impassioned plea, saying that small businessmen must work hard to survive, and he had worked 365 days in his store last year.

“This business is not for fun, this business is for my survival. Do not let me die,” he pleaded.

Council, however, was united in its opposition to staff’s recommendation to approve the zoning amendment. Coun. Judy Sentes said she appreciated the challenges faced by entrepreneurs, but that a residential neighbourhood wasn’t the right place.

“This business does not lend itself to the location,” said Coun. Judy Sentes, as she moved to deny the zoning amendment.

Coun. Max Picton, who voted against first reading on March 7, said he didn’t think it was appropriate for the discussion to have gotten this far.

“I think it is a huge stretch to say it is ancillary to a convenience store,” said Coun. Max Picton, adding that having had a business fail, he understood the challenges, but also agreed the neighbourhood wasn’t the right spot.

Councillor Andre Martin didn’t agree the U-Haul trucks posed a safety issue but was concerned by the number of vehicles, and that Oh had already gone over the limit he had been given.

Martin said he would support Oh having an agent’s licence, but the vehicles would have to be parked elsewhere.

Council voted unanimously to deny the zoning amendment.