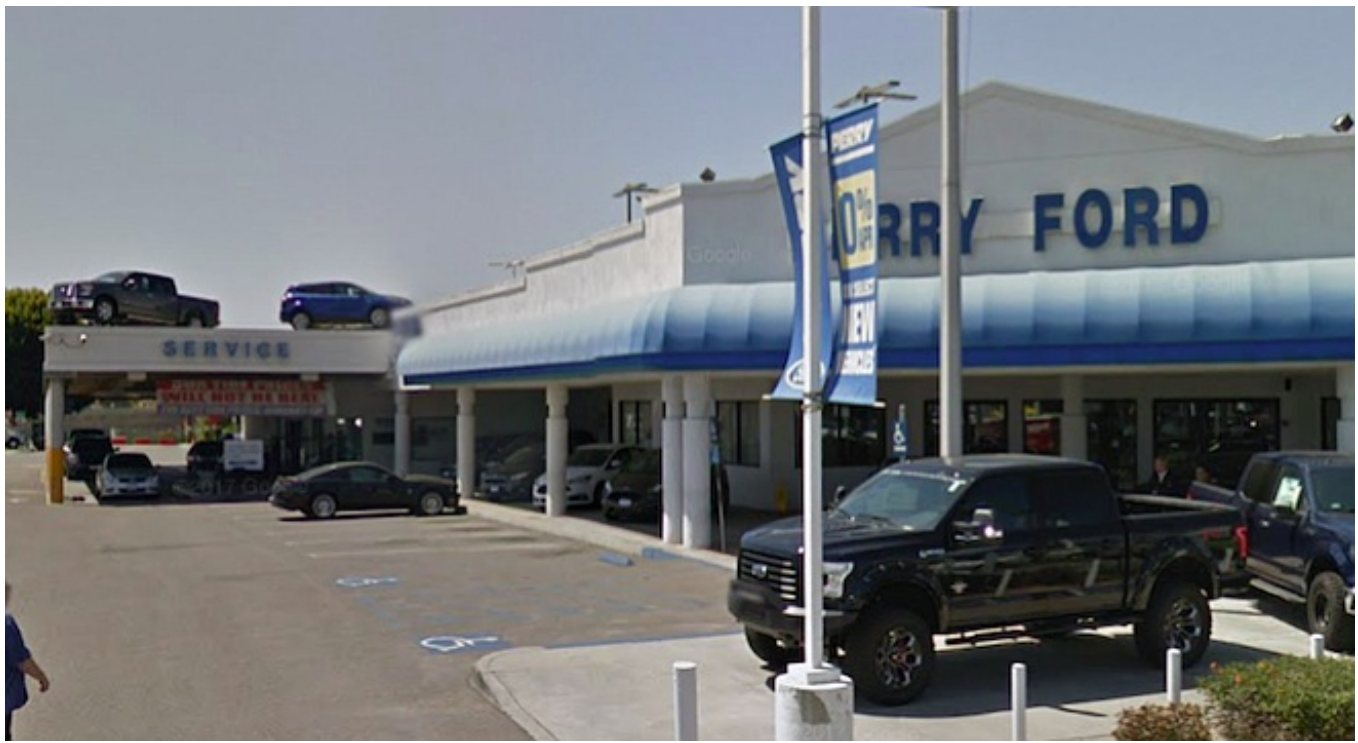


# National City puts Perry Ford under "green" spotlight

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By Sheila  
Pell



Over the next two weeks, the National City Council will make a list. A green list. It will include, among other conditions, the "certified biodegradable" products Perry Ford can use at its auto shop across the street from an award-winning low-income housing complex.

On August 15, the council sided with residents of Paradise Creek apartments, who oppose any new auto work nearby. Perry Ford is seeking a permit to expand auto sales and "accessory uses," which could mean more toxic chemicals in the Westside neighborhood, one of the most polluted in the state, [according to CalEnviroScreen](#).

Many speakers at the meeting said the shop would violate [the 2010 Westside Specific Plan](#), which aims to separate homes from businesses that use and store hazardous materials. Instead, the area, zoned limited commercial, should support retail, offices, and artist live-work studios.

"The purpose of the Westside plan is to make the city safer and cleaner," said resident José Rodriguez. Yet, "we continue to give these permits right where people live." And sometimes, work goes on even without a permit.

In 2016, auto repair, detailing, and storage were already underway at the lot when the business was caught operating without a building permit, business license, or zoning approvals, according to city reports. A stop-work order was issued for a carport under construction. At the same time, the planning department learned that permits had not been obtained to convert a warehouse to an auto-repair garage — with auto lifts — and an auto-detail area. The city subsequently denied Perry Ford's request for a conditional use permit for their unpermitted work and an appeal was filed.

As the council took it up again last week, they faced an angry backlash from residents and environmental justice groups who hoped to see the permit rejected, not modified.

"It was a slap in the face" to residents who trust city council to uphold the Westside Plan, said Sandy Naranjo of the Environmental Health Coalition. "Old town residents cannot tolerate any more pollution."

Jonathan Michaels, a Newport Beach attorney for Perry Ford, said the housing project that began in 2015 is "equally important" as the industry but it's only been there "a short time," while Perry Ford has been there since 1962. He cited a 1400-page site report the applicant had done, received in July, that hasn't been released to anyone else. There were no environmental concerns, he said. The property isn't contaminated "or even remotely so."

But the report, which did not test soil or groundwater, only considers the property, not the products that would be used there. Joy Williams, research director for the Environmental Health Coalition, said the group still has no list of products that might be used, but these could include toxic and corrosive compounds, such as hydrofluoric acid or ammonium bifluoride, used to clean wheels and tunnel walls.

A public records request by the health coalition noted violations: a waste oil spill earlier this year, and an inspection finding that Perry Ford had not adequately maintained the facility to minimize fire and spill hazards.

Michaels defended the proposed uses — a car wash, detailing, sales — as "benign." When questioned about what "detailing" would involve, he referred to "PDI," or predelivery inspection, which spruces up cars that were exposed to the elements in shipping. When councilmembers asked for a list of the chemicals and solvents to be used, Michaels said he didn't have one. The car wash would use "soap and water" and it would be in an enclosed facility called a clarifier.

"The critical issue with the hazardous materials are antifreeze and brake fluid," he said. Several speakers pressed, wanting to know what was in the soap, but Michaels couldn't answer. Asked by the council if there would be any toxic chemicals, the attorney said no.

"There are no toxic materials that will be dangerous to any of the residents of the city," declared Michaels.

Of the conditions being shaped, allowed uses will include new-car predelivery preparation, electrical, trim, and outdoor vehicle storage. Prohibited practices are detailing and mechanical work (including tire rotation or alignments). No hazardous materials, like antifreeze, can be used or stored onsite. And there will be random spot inspections. The council will continue the issue on September 5.

Mayor Ron Morrison was the only vote against the motion, saying if the terms were agreed to, there was nothing left to consider. Critics of the permit, however, see plenty of details to work out: for example, the list of certified green chemicals the carwash must use.

Williams, of the health coalition, said in an email that the group isn't ready to make recommendations yet. There are products marketed as "green" auto cleaners, but they haven't fully researched them to know if there are hazardous ingredients, she says. "One of our ongoing problems with this whole process is that Perry Ford never provided any information on what they were using — not to us and not to city staff either."