

Car wash at Gary Rome Hyundai approved by Holyoke City Council

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HOLYOKE — After a long debate and two votes, the City Council on Tuesday approved a special permit for Gary Rome Hyundai to build a \$4 million, 9,500-square-foot car wash next to its Whiting Farms Road dealership.

Owner Gary Rome expects a fall groundbreaking and a spring grand opening.

The first vote on the special permit fell short 8-3. Councilor Jenny Rivera, the likely deciding vote, was absent from Tuesday's meeting. Councilors later reconsidered and approved the permit unanimously.

Councilor at Large Kevin Jourdain introduced an amendment to the permit that would have banned music being played by customers using the vacuums. Jourdain's motion failed to garner a second.

Jourdain and Councilors Israel Rivera and Jose Maldonado Velez initially cast "no" votes. Councilor at Large Joseph McGiverin introduced the motion to reconsider, which was quickly adopted.

After more debate, the council accepted a watered-down version of Jourdain's amendment, which now states that residential abutters should not hear music from the car wash.

Rome, the dealership's founder, appeared before the City Council's Development and Government Relations Committee on July 20. He pitched a car wash and detailing center on a parcel south of the car lot. The car wash's architectural style would be in keeping with the main facility and be built closer to the street.

The plans include touchless and full-service car washes, a waiting room, bathrooms, a manager's office and four detailing bays.

Rome said the city would benefit from utility revenues with increased water, sewer and electricity usage, higher property and building values, and eight to 12 new employees. He added that 30% of employees live in Holyoke.

"We're all about Holyoke," he said.

"We want to increase our community partnership and host many car wash fundraising events for schools, nonprofits and teams," Rome told the committee.

The car wash will align with the dealership's "eco-friendly" design and philosophy, he said, incorporating renewable technologies, recycled building materials, high-efficiency doors and windows, and a roof equipped to handle solar panels.

A large percentage of the water used will be recycled and reclaimed, reducing runoff from the car wash. While the dealership has a basic car wash on-site, a special permit is needed for the new structure.

Rome added the car wash would be sleek and modern and not an eyesore, mirroring the dealership. “The curb appeal would only increase once the car wash is built as we plan for lush shrubbery and newly planted trees to surround the building,” he said.

He expected noise pollution at the minimum with the car vacuum motors housed inside a soundproof room. The car wash will also use stealth dryers that are 30% quieter than conventional systems.

The dealership employed consultants to study traffic flow and reported no significant disruptions to the surrounding neighborhood. The car wash’s hours of operation would match the dealership’s. A locked gate will prevent after-hours loitering.

Security features include smart cameras with artificial intelligence technology, motion-sensor LED lighting and fencing along the property line.

Ward 5 Councilor Linda Vacon said an abutter noted a tree line separating the parcel from multifamily housing. Vacon asked Rome if the trees would remain along with other plantings. Rome replied that the trees and plantings would stay in place.

Abutters within 300 feet of the proposed location were notified about the hearing.

Resident John Rivera asked if the car wash’s blacktop would produce a heat island effect. Rome said the car wash’s impervious or solid surface was small and had little to no impact on the area.

Other speakers expressed concerns about water usage and the facility’s environmental impact.