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City sued over Lakes angled parking

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By Michelle Knight

knight@theacorn.com



A Thousand Oaks man told the *Acorn* on Tuesday he never authorized an attorney to sue the city for failing to provide disabled parking in front of The Lakes shopping center.

"The lawsuit makes it sound like I'm raking in the dough," said 45-year-old Eric Langner, a quadriplegic who relies on a wheelchair to get around.

Late last month, attorney Mark Potter, a partner in a San Diego-based civil rights firm, filed a complaint against the city of Thousand Oaks for not providing a handicapped parking space when it installed 26 angled parking spaces last summer in front of The Lakes on Thousand Oaks Boulevard.

Though the lawsuit was made in his name, Langner said he did not authorize it. He said the law firm is trying to take advantage of disabled people.

"These lawyers are making money on the backs of us because we point out all this stuff," Langner said

Calls to Potter from the *Acorn* seeking comment were not returned.

The 26 angled parking spaces in front of The Lakes have drawn criticism from residents since the City Council approved installing them last year at a cost of \$230,000 and spending nearly \$200,000 more in design and consultant fees.

Langner, who's been paralyzed from the neck down since a diving accident 22 years ago, said he met Potter last spring at the Abilities Expo in Los Angeles, an annual convention highlighting products and services for people with disabilities.

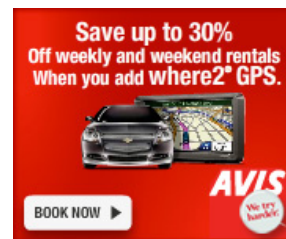
Potter, he said, handed him a business card and asked if he had encountered problems accessing public places. Langner said he told the attorney about the lack of disabled parking in front of The Lakes.

"I knew he was going to do something, but that extreme, no," Langner said.

The lawsuit—served to the city Aug. 11—seeks an unspecified amount but no less than \$25,000 in damages.

City Attorney Amy Albano said officials believe the city has complied with all government regulations regarding disabled parking at The Lakes.

"We don't agree with all of the assertions of the lawsuit," she said, noting in particular the assertion that the city must



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provide on-street parking for the disabled. "And yet we are still reviewing the allegations of the complaint."

Albano said Thousand Oaks has been sensitive to issues regarding the disabled and has a long history of at times going beyond what the law requires.

She pointed out that the city's disability access board offers input on all major project designs.

T.O. Senior Planner Haider Alawami said the city did not add disabled parking in front of The Lakes because it felt there were sufficient handicapped spots in the back. Those 12 spots provide the shortest path to shops, he added.

The law requires that when there are 501 or more parking spaces, that at least 2 percent of the spaces are designated for the disabled, Alawami said. Since there are 546 total spaces at the Lakes, including front and back, the city is required to provide a total of 11 handicapped spaces.

The city has until Sept. 12 to respond to the lawsuit.

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