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Bob Shallit: Entrepreneur aiming to give midtown an electric-vehicle jolt

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An electric-car showroom could be opening this year at a midtown corner where gas-guzzling Chevys were sold a half-century ago.

Developer and parking magnate **Aaron Zeff** has acquired the glass-walled building at the southwest corner of 17th and I streets and is negotiating for a dealership with **Zenn Motor Co.**, a Canadian manufacturer of low-speed electric cars.

He says it's fitting that zero-emission vehicles be sold and leased at a spot where Vogel Chevrolet operated between 1933 and 1957 and Geer Chevy for another decade after that.

"What's old is new," Zeff says.

The Zenn (Zero Emission No Noise) cars, available at only 35 U.S. dealerships (including one in Davis), have a maximum speed of 25 mph and travel 30 to 40 miles on a single battery charge. Priced at about \$16,000, they are designed purely for in-city driving and are not allowed on freeways.

A Zenn official confirms it has talked with Zeff about the dealership proposal but has not entered into a contract.

Zeff, owner of **Priority Parking** and the newly elected president of the Midtown Business Association, says he envisions selling or leasing the cars to people who live or work downtown. Under one plan, customers with a monthly lease would get free parking in one of his central city lots and free washes at his **Harv's Car Wash**.

The monthly rate? Still to be determined. But, Zeff says, it would be a great "value proposition in today's economy."

Zeff bought the retail site and adjoining garage last week for \$3.6 million from **Ravel Rasmussen Properties** and **Separovich Domich Development**.

He isn't saying how quickly he hopes to open a Zenn dealership. But the building's current tenant – **Mayor Heather Fargo's** re-election campaign – might want to work extra hard to avoid a run-off.

If she doesn't and the campaign extends into November, Zeff jokes that the mayor "may face eviction."

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Lofty perch: Speaking of the mayor's race, Fargo challenger **Kevin Johnson** has joined the list of movers and shakers buying midtown condos.

The former NBA star has acquired an 1,100-square-foot unit in the L Street Lofts, at 18th and K streets, reports **Sotiris Kolokotronis**, developer of the 92-unit complex, where prices range from \$389,000 to \$1.2 million.

Johnson could not be reached for comment on his move from Curtis Park to midtown.

Kolokotronis says the mayoral candidate is now among 25 occupants of the eight-story complex. Another 15 or so are in escrow to buy units.

The developer is still looking for a restaurant tenant for the building's ground floor. Talks recently broke down with one potential operator – a European-style eatery from the Bay Area.

Kolokotronis says two other "very good" restaurant operators are now considering the site. He declines to identify them but says both have experience running restaurants in the Sacramento region.

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Good egg: Sacramento financial planner and investment adviser **Scott Hanson** doesn't know much about hens. "Even less about farming," he admits.

But he does know something about "basic business principles." Which is why he and his wife, **Valerie**, are off to Mozambique this week to oversee construction of chicken coops that will house 10,000 hens, laying 6,000 eggs every day.

The couple underwrote the entire \$150,000 project – in Maputo, Mozambique's capital city – and want to help get it started.

Their goal: to stimulate economic development in what Hanson says is one of the world's poorest countries.

Hanson, whose **Hanson McClain Inc.** now has nine offices across the country, says the farming enterprise could be operating within 90 days. A church-backed group, **WorldVenture**, will oversee operations for a few years, then turn it over to the locals.

"Our whole idea is to get native people to run it and own it and then get out of their way," he says.

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