

Hells Angels set to relocate

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Mark Rose, a land acquisition specialist on loan from City Hall, said negotiations for the clubhouse are approaching a breakthrough.

"They think they've found someplace to move," he said. "It looks like they're about ready."

In some neighborhoods, residents are apprehensive about having the Hells Angels as neighbors.

The club's membership locally has ranged from a half-dozen to 50 in recent years.

The group has had many problems with police and rival gangs over the years, including a pipe bomb that blew up outside the West State Street clubhouse in 1990 and a police raid that uncovered weapons and drugs in 1997.

"I sure wouldn't want that down here," said Carmella Cason, owner of Maria's Italian Cafe, 828 Cunningham St.

One rumor has the Hells Angels interested in the former Lush Heads Association private club two blocks away at 627 Cunningham St. The club is closed and the building has been vacant for several months.

Officials of the defunct Lush Heads could not be reached for comment.

There also is speculation that the club is scouting sites in a more rural area along Pierpont Avenue west of town.

Rockford Assistant Deputy Police Chief Jeff Morris said city offi-

cials would be happy having the Hells Angels move outside the city — and into the jurisdiction of the Winnebago County sheriff's department.

Morris recalled periodic trouble at the clubhouse with drug and weapons investigations.

"They themselves haven't caused a lot of trouble," he said, "but the whole crowd is certainly something Rockford could do without."

Yet another rumor has the club eyeing real estate near the center of town at Seventh Street and Broadway, in a neighborhood where civic leaders have worked years combating crime and poverty.

Ald. Ed Akre, R-11th, who represents the area, said he heard the motorcycle gang was shopping the neighborhood for clubhouse sites.

Although he said not all motorcycle riders are troublesome, Akre said the club's headquarters could be a setback for urban renewal efforts in the neighborhood.

"You get a club going, and there'll be a lot of bikers," he said.

Olson, the school district official, said school officials have not tried to influence the club's decision on choosing a new headquarters.

He acknowledged that other neighborhoods might not welcome the Hells Angels. He said the school construction project also has displaced a couple of houses occupied by suspected drug dealers.



Rockford Register Star file photo

Two motorcycle club members stand side by side at the July 2, 1994, funeral of LaMonte Mathias.

Key events

Past troubles involving the Hells Angels:

■ **April 1986:** Club member Peter Jacobson beaten to death when club members brawl with other patrons at a local tavern.

■ **November 1990:** A pipe bomb explodes outside the clubhouse, injuring three police officers as they try to evacuate the area.

■ **June 1994:** Club member LaMonte Mathias murdered in a suspected clash with the rival Outlaws biker group.

■ **October 1994:** Club president Roger Fiebrantz injured when a bomb explodes in his pickup truck.

■ **January 1997:** Drug agents report finding weapons and drugs in clubhouse, along with other evidence seized from a member's home.

"All I know is we're cleaning up a neighborhood," he said. "We're just treating the property owners with the same respect we treat everyone else."