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Garcetti with plans for the home he is building in Brentwood.

Prosecutor's Neighbors Cite Law, Fight Garage

By TERRY PRISTIN, *Times Staff Writer*

Chief Deputy Dist. Atty. Gilbert I. Garcetti is at the center of a controversy that has his opponents accusing him of arrogance and an unwillingness to comply with the law.

The dispute, however, has nothing to do with Garcetti's role as the county's No. 2 prosecutor. Instead, it involves the garage that goes with a redwood-and-brick home he is building on a \$1-million parcel of land in the exclusive Brentwood Park area above Sunset Boulevard.

Last November, Garcetti was ordered by the city's Building and Safety Department to halt construction of the nearly completed garage because neighbors complained that he had violated a zoning restriction requiring the structure to be located at least 40 feet back from the property line.

According to Garcetti, there are 43 feet between the three-car garage and the curb of the street. But as it turns out, the first 25 feet of his front yard belongs to the city, not to him—a fact he said he did not discover until last October.

On Thursday, Garcetti won a round against his neighbors before the city's Building Advisory Appeal Board, but the neighbors say they will continue the fight.

To members of the Brentwood Park Homeowners Assn., whose board voted unanimously to oppose the garage, the structure represents an affront to what one described as "the park-like quality of our neighborhood." Most of the homes have front lawns that extend 100 feet back from the street.

Ten of Garcetti's neighbors, in-
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Disputed garage being built by Chief Deputy Dist. Atty. Garcetti.

GARCETTI: Zoning Restriction Fought

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cluding a retired Superior Court judge, turned up at Thursday's hearing. The prosecutor was accompanied by his architect, Marshall Lewis, and two civil engineers.

Dan Harnett, whose property abuts Garcetti's, told the board: "Now, I understand ignorance of the law, but I have a problem when it's the chief deputy district attorney."

Accusing Garcetti of "a certain amount of arrogance," Harnett, an

attorney, said his new neighbor should set an example, not flout the law. "While he's pleading innocence, my property values are going down substantially," the neighbor added.

"Anyone who stands in the middle of the street can see that the houses are all in a line," Vee Motto of the homeowners association testified. ". . . I've never heard of anyone, except for one man from Minnesota, who thought that the property line was out to the street."

To Garcetti, changing the plans at this late date would represent "an incredible hardship," wreaking violence on his architect's aesthetic concept.

"It's the architectural integrity," an exasperated Garcetti said outside the hearing room, pointing to a blueprint that shows how the rounded sides of the garage echo the design of the house. "You can see all the curves."

The prosecutor acknowledges that a mistake was made, but he contends that it was an honest misunderstanding resulting from reliance on an outdated map. He also noted that the plans were approved by a city inspector, and that the 4,500-square-foot, four-bedroom house itself is a full 100 feet from the curb.

Known for his sartorial elegance and his skill in photography (a separate structure in the 80-foot-long backyard will house a darkroom), Garcetti is related through his marriage to the founders of the Roth Family Foundation, which supports local cultural and educational programs, including public broadcasting. He currently lives in Encino.

While voting 4 to 1 to allow him to finish the garage, the board as a compromise ordered him to remove a nine-foot extension intended for storing bicycles and to provide landscaping to conceal the offending structure.

But the neighbors said they will appeal the board's recommendation to the Board of Building and Safety Commissioners, which is scheduled to review the case Feb. 3.

Meanwhile, architect Lewis said he believes that the Garcetti house, being built at a cost of \$600,000, will enhance an otherwise dull street, where many of the homes are hidden behind fences as tall as eight feet.