

# La Habra will pay strip club to close

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After almost a decade of court battles and unsuccessful attempts to shut down the only strip club in La Habra, city officials announced this week that they would pay the owner \$5.2 million to get out of town.

As part of the settlement, the city will buy the property for \$3 million.

The city made the offer Aug. 6 during the Orange County Superior Court trial of a lawsuit against the city filed by Badi “Bill” Gammoh, owner of the Taboo Gentlemen’s Club. The City Council approved the deal Monday.

The offer was made after Gammoh’s attorneys finished making their case to the jury. The city chose to settle the lawsuit, filed in 1998, without laying out its case in court.

Gammoh was traveling in the Middle East and unavailable for comment, but he was pleased with the settlement, said attorney Stuart Miller. “This is a man who stood up for his rights and refused to cave in. The city figured they could just wait him out. They were wrong,” he said.

City Manager Assistant Jennifer Cervantez said “the timing was just right” to settle years of litigation with Gammoh. “It had been discussed for a period of time.”

La Habra and Gammoh have squared off in at least five court battles that began in 1995 when he applied for a business license to open the club, and they have been in litigation ever since. He went into business in 1998 after the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the city could not ban the club just because it offered nude dancing onstage.

In a move aimed at Taboo, the city banned lap dances by passing an ordinance in 1998 requiring dancers to be at least six feet from customers. Gammoh won a lawsuit overturning the ordinance. The city countered with a new law in 2003 that forced the bikini-clad lap dancers to stay at least two feet from customers.

He lost a challenge to the 2003 ordinance.

The lawsuit being heard in Orange County Superior Court was for damages Gammoh said he suffered between 1998 and 2003, when the six-foot distance was in effect, Miller said.

In a written statement, Mayor James Gomez said the settlement was good for the city.

However, the two sides differed on the terms. Miller said \$3 million from the settlement was for the purchase of the property, \$750,000 for business compensation, and the rest, more than \$1.4 million, was for damages.