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# Politics Report: Votes Thrown Out in Barrio Logan

District Attorney Summer Stephan opens up about a controversial decision and more. Community planning in Barrio Logan is a big deal and causing big political moves. The charter schools are coming (to a convention).

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March 25, 2018



A view of the NASSCO shipyards from Barrio Logan. / Photo by Sam Hodgson

All politics is local and perhaps its most local form is the community planning group.

Each neighborhood has a community planning group. The city of San Diego's 42 groups held elections this month.



For one neighborhood, though — probably the one with the most at stake right now — it did not go smoothly.

Wednesday evening the Barrio Logan Community Planning Group stopped counting votes

and leaders decided they needed to have a special meeting to decertify the election and try again.

**The problem:** Activists with the Environmental Health Coalition, or EHC, had allegedly electioneered too close to voters. They were handing out [this flier](#) with guidance for whom residents should vote.

“They were in violation of the law requiring them to stay back at least 100’ from the entrance to the polling place while promoting candidates,” wrote Mark Steele, an architect and chairman of the group, in a message to his colleagues about how they needed to convene soon to fix what happened.

When we talked to Steele, he said it’s not a big deal.

“They were just over enthusiastic. You can’t participate in any sort of political work outside of the polling place. You have to stay 100 feet away. Because that violated election procedures, we determined the election was flawed and we could not certify it. Simple,” he said.

**The other side of the story:** Diane Takvorian, the executive director of EHC, admits the group was just 50 feet away from voters. However, she produced the group's bylaws, which don't seem to include anything about that breaking the rules.

There are rules for regular elections — the ones where you choose mayors and members of Congress. But those don't necessarily cover community planning groups. For one thing, each group has different rules about who can qualify to run. And you don't need to be a registered voter, for example, to vote in community planning group elections — though some groups have special rules for that, too.

“We want a full review of the election. We want all of those ballots to be retained pending outcome of the investigation,” Takvorian said. She said it was a matter of civil rights and representation.

**What's at stake:** Community planning groups have limited powers. If one of them reviews a proposed building project negatively, it's only a recommendation to the Planning Commission and City Council.

But in practice, the groups are influential. Developers often tweak their designs and plans to appease the groups.

**Even more important:** Community planning groups have major influence on the community plans that dictate zoning rules for each neighborhood. Barrio Logan's plan is notoriously outdated. It's many decades old and allows anyone to build anything in the neighborhood — welding shops sit next to