

5 Things David Alvarez Has Done

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Photo by Sam Hodgson

City Councilman David Alvarez rallies supporters outside his home.

Mayoral contender David Alvarez has represented the city's southwest neighborhoods for nearly three years but many San Diegans are only just getting to know him.

The relatively quiet, low-drama councilman must bolster his public profile to succeed in the race, a task that should get easier thanks to high-profile labor and Democratic Party endorsements

(<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/sep/24/democratic-party-endorses-alvarez-mayor-san-diego/>).

Here's a look at five things Alvarez has worked on or promoted since he was elected to the City Council in late 2010.

Pushing a New Community Plan

For decades, Barrio Logan has been known for its mishmash of industry and residential spaces. Commercial areas can border a block of houses. Alvarez is especially familiar with that configuration. He grew up in the neighborhood.

Years later, he was the councilman who pushed a compromise that allowed the City Council to approve a new blueprint for the community's future growth. Last week's 5-4 vote followed years of neighborhood input, work by planning staffers and fierce opposition from the maritime industry.

Georgette Gomez of the Environmental Health Coalition, whose political arm has since endorsed

(<http://www.sandiegopolitico.com/2013/09/environmental-health-justice-campaign.html>) Alvarez, said the councilman was committed to ensuring the community plan went forward.

“There was always that threat of dropping everything,” Gomez said. “He was very committed to making sure there was a community plan at council to be adopted.”

In the end, Alvarez brokered a compromise (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2013/09/18/alvarez-strikes-final-compromise-for-childhood-home/>) that barred housing in a commercial buffer zone between industrial areas and residential areas, one of two requests the maritime industry urged in the days before the vote.

The deal ushered in City Council approval but the maritime industry (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2013/09/13/why-the-maritime-industry-cares-so-much-about-the-barrio-logan-plan/>) – and at least a handful of residents – opposed the last-minute change because it ignored their other request that companies that sell shipyard products should be allowed to operate in the buffer zone.

Industry representatives have since announced plans to refer the recently approved community plan to the ballot (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2013/09/20/barrio->

logan-what-happens-next/). To do so, they'd need to collect more than 30,000 signatures in 30 days.

Fight Against Blight

In 2011, two advocacy groups approached Alvarez with a proposal: Cities across the country had approved ordinances to create registries of homes in the foreclosure process to ensure banks can't escape responsibility for abandoned properties that fall prey to blight. Could San Diego do something similar?

Alvarez championed such a measure (<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/Nov/13/foreclosure-registry-headline-goes-here/>) despite significant opposition from fellow City Council members, real estate agents and the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. He now considers it one of his most significant accomplishments, though it came years after neighboring cities, including Chula Vista, approved programs (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124112509277274533.html>) to combat foreclosure-related blight.

The final version of the San Diego ordinance, which was approved in a 5-3 vote last November, requires banks to register with the city and pay a \$76 fee within 10 days of delivering a notice of default to a homeowner. Those payments are supposed to cover the city oversight and maintenance of foreclosed properties. Lenders who don't must pay up to \$100 a day, with the total charge capped at \$5,000 annually.

The city's former code enforcement chief, who was initially critical of the measure, said the city would need to hire three staffers to manage the registry but expected those costs to be covered by the program.

Supporters say the measure survived because Alvarez was willing to confer with opponents throughout the process.

“He had a lot of one-on-one conversations with different players along the way,” said Clare Crawford, executive director of the Center on Policy Initiatives, one of two groups that initially approached Alvarez about the ordinance.

Tourism Marketing Dealmaker

This spring, it seemed former Mayor Bob Filner wouldn't sign a new tourism marketing deal unless physically forced.

Filner and hoteliers fought for months over an agreement previously approved by the City Council, a months-long battle that hit its climax with a March 26 vote to force the mayor to sign the document.

Alvarez was sick and missed the meeting but he later said

(<http://www.10news.com/news/mayor-city-council-tmd-board-agree-on-revised-operating-agreement-032813>) that when he watched a video of the gathering, he was struck by how close the two sides actually were to a deal.

After a series of conversations with Filner and hoteliers, Alvarez managed to eke out the basic framework

(<http://kpbs.media.clients.ellingtoncms.com/news/documents/2013/03/28/3-28-13-revised-tmd-term-sheet.pdf>) of the eventual deal.

“I think it just maybe needed perhaps a different perspective – it was already there,” Alvarez said at a press conference

(<http://www.10news.com/news/mayor-city-council-tmd-board-agree-on-revised-operating-agreement-032813>) the day the deal went public.

Filner publicly credited

(<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:7nQsBU15dgMJ:www.sandiego.gov/mayor/pdf/2013/release130328.pdf+8>) Alvarez for helping to secure the deal.

“His commitment and my commitment were to protect the taxpayers while ensuring the growth of our tourist economy,” Filner said.

The former mayor signed a more specific agreement about three weeks later.

The most significant outcome of those last-minute negotiations emerged in July, when the Tourism Authority laid off 40 percent of its staff

(<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/Jul/25/tourism-authority-slashes-budget-employee-layoffs/>) after the city failed to release hotel surcharges collected at most city hotels.

The city held back those funds because the new contract requires hoteliers to sign waivers clearing the city of legal liability. Filner and

others maintained such legal protections were essential in the event the set-up, which relies on hotel surcharges, is overturned by a judge.

'No' Votes for Downtown

As former Mayor Jerry Sanders pushed to prioritize downtown development and tourism interests, Alvarez was consistently his prime dissenter on the City Council.

In February 2011, he was the sole vote (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2011/03/01/three-takeaways-from-the-4-billion-decision/>) against a downtown-dominated list of projects to be completed with a final crush of state redevelopment funds.

At the time, he argued other neighborhoods deserved a fair share of the cash.

“It might be easy for people who have never been poor to water down the definition of blight to fund pet projects while ignoring the real needs of poor neighborhoods,” Alvarez said at the 2011 meeting. “It’s a lot harder for those of us who have personally experienced poverty and who live in blighted neighborhoods to accept this inequality.”

Later that year, Alvarez was one of only two City Council members to cast an initial vote (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2011/12/06/those-who-benefit-pay-what-they-want-convention-center-expansion/>) against Sanders’ plan to finance the Convention Center expansion. He had previously tried to delay the vote because he said he hadn’t received enough information

about the plan to tack a 1 percent to 3 percent charge on hotel stays across the city. (Visitors who stay in hotels closer to the Convention Center pay higher fees.)

When the financing plan came to a final vote (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2012/10/01/convention-center-financing-deja-vu/>) last October, Alvarez was the only opposing council member.

Alvarez has said hotels in his southern San Diego district won't benefit (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2011/12/06/those-who-benefit-pay-what-they-want-convention-center-expansion/>) from the expansion so they shouldn't need to tack additional surcharges to their bills. Today, Alvarez continues to speak proudly about that vote but he also publicly supports (<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/Sep/12/convention-expansion-backers-build-support/>) boosting the Convention Center.

And though Alvarez later brokered a tourism marketing deal with hoteliers, he's also been an outspoken opponent (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2011/07/31/hoteliers-get-even-more-ambitious-with-room-charge/>) of that funding concept too.

The Democrats' Ideas Guy

Former Republican Councilman Carl DeMaio was best known for his plans for the city budget and pension reform but Alvarez floated a couple ideas in those realms too.

The first came in 2011 after voters rejected a proposed sales-tax hike (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/2012/09/06/tax-hike-failed-but-public-safety-didnt-reality-check/>) and Sanders seemed poised to recommend service cuts for the following year. Alvarez responded with a six-page memo (<http://www.sandiego.gov/citycouncil/cd8/pdf/110329memo.pdf>) suggesting ways the city could trim nearly \$47 million without making reductions residents would feel.

Most of his ideas weren't new. Alvarez relied on task force suggestions, a report from the city's independent budget analyst and even DeMaio's Roadmap to Recovery (<http://carldemaio.com/files/roadmaptotherecovery.pdf>). (file:///Y:/Issues2/Lisa/AlvarezThings092613.docx#_msocom_3)

Alvarez's suggested cuts included eliminating 125 vacant city positions and cell phones for most city staffers, and significantly trimming discretionary city contracts.

Alvarez released another plan in 2012.

About 10 months after city Republicans coalesced behind their own pension overhaul plan, Alvarez aimed for a City Council vote to put a similar measure ([http://voiceofsandiego.org/2013/09/23/fact-check-alvarezs-pension-reform-plan/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+voice-of-san-diego-all-articles+\(All+articles+voiceofsandiego.org+--+full+feed\)](http://voiceofsandiego.org/2013/09/23/fact-check-alvarezs-pension-reform-plan/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+voice-of-san-diego-all-articles+(All+articles+voiceofsandiego.org+--+full+feed))) he conceived on the ballot.

Alvarez's measure mirrored the opposing Proposition B with a couple major exceptions: It allowed city pensions to continue, capping them at \$99,999 annually for new workers and nixed plans to create a 401(k) system.

The result, Alvarez argued, was that the city could recover the full cost savings associated with Prop. B without the roughly \$13 million charge associated with the new defined benefit plan.

But then-City Council President Tony Young refused to allow a City Council vote on Alvarez's measure and Prop. B later prevailed.

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