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What's at Stake With Propositions B and C?

by [Jim Miller](#) on May 12, 2014 · [2 comments](#)

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“Everyone who wants to preserve community control over the planning process should be afraid because your community will be next!” –Georgette Gomez, Associate Director of the Environmental Health Coalition



By Jim

Miller

As we head toward the June 3rd election, the same corporate interests who spent big money to fund a [petition drive based on lies](#) to force a vote on the [Barrio Logan Community Plan](#) are now funding an [equally dishonest campaign](#) to defeat it.

As the *San Diego Reader* recently noted, the No on B and C Campaign's sleazy tactics include teaming former mayor and current corporate front man Jerry Sanders up with a "[crooked ex-admiral](#)" to repeat the same bald-faced lies about how the Barrio Logan Community Plan will kill jobs and drive the Navy out of San Diego.

Doug Porter aptly summed it up here at the *San Diego Free Press* when [he noted that](#), "The expected TV advertising campaign underwritten by multinational corporations opposed to the Barrio Logan Community

plan has begun and it's only marginally more truthful than the pack of lies they peddled during their drive to get the measure on the ballot.”

Indeed as I have observed before in this column, this use of the initiative process by moneyed interests to undermine representative local democracy is an [ironic subversion](#) of the original populist intent of this process:

[In]San Diego in particular of late, the referendum process has been perverted into a tool of the rich and/or powerful corporate interests. In the case of the Barrio Logan Community Plan, it is an example of out of state corporate money heavily funding a malicious, dishonest campaign to dictate the living conditions of one of the poorest communities of color in our city because they couldn't extort everything they wanted out of the local government.

This is a truly dangerous development and the deck is even more stacked against the needs of the community in a low turnout special election.

The only thing that will stop a great injustice from happening in the case of the Barrio Logan Community Plan is if San Diegans stand up against this threat to their local democracy and vote yes on B and C. For that to happen, San Diegans need to be educated. The central organization doing this work in the service of the Yes on B and C Campaign is the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC).

This week, I interview Georgette Gomez, the Associate Director of the EHC to learn a little more about who the folks are who are fighting this good fight and what is at stake in this election.

How did you get involved with the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC)?



Photo via Point Loma Democratic Club

I became familiar with the EHC's work during my college years. I was running an Environmental Justice school club at SDSU, which led to my connections with EHC. I immediately became familiar with their work in Barrio Logan. This was important to me because I always wanted to come back to my place of birth (which is Barrio Logan) and work to improve and uplift the community.

Aside from being from Barrio Logan, I also come from a migrant family, who left Mexico to provide a "better" life for the family. Working on environmental and social justice work is a drive for me because I lived practically all the injustices that one can experience. From having parents who worked more than two jobs and had to share a home with another family to make rent, to having to borrow money to buy food so we could eat, having my father be deported, and coming out to my traditional but very supportive family, I have dealt with it all. You can say that this led to my wanting to work for a better world that does not have

injustices!

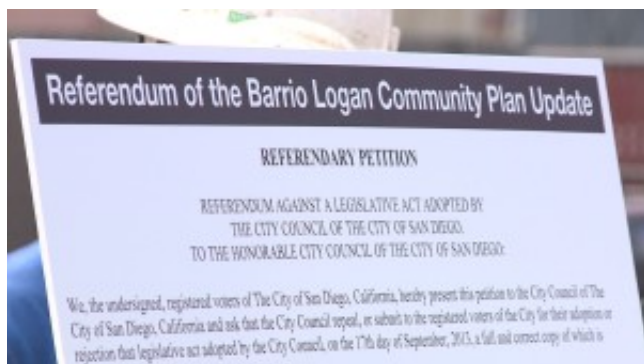
What is the Barrio Logan Plan? What does it do? How does it affect the community?

The Barrio Logan Plan is a blueprint for how the community develops over time due to the needs of the community. It determines housing requirements, public facilities, the need for schools and open spaces, etc. The 1978 community plan in Barrio Logan is the oldest plan in existence that the City of San Diego has. Much has occurred since 1978: the population in Barrio Logan has grown and there is a necessity for more open space, affordable housing, and public facilities to serve the community. We also need to improve the roads and make Barrio Logan more walkable. Furthermore and most importantly, the 1978 plan amended the community plan to allow for residential units and industrial businesses to be built next to each other. This has resulted in negative impacts on the health of Barrio Logan residents. People have come to suffer from asthma issues, cancer, brain development problems, and skin and eye irritations just to name a few.

In 2008 the City of San Diego launched the process to update the 1978 Barrio Logan Community Plan. A thirty-three member group of stakeholders was created. This was done because Barrio Logan does not have a Community Planning Group. The community planning update process took five years of outreach, which helped shape the final update. By the end of this process the updated plan was supported by the majority of the stakeholders and the Planning Commission. In October of 2013, the San Diego City Council adopted the new community plan for Barrio Logan.

Barrio Logan children and families have felt the effects of poor land-use policies since the Barrio Logan Community plan was last updated in 1978, and the 2013 update gives the community a new chance at having healthy neighborhoods by designating specific zones for homes, businesses, and industry.

How did we get to the point of having to vote on this? What are the central problems with this process?



The new community plan for Barrio Logan was adopted by the City Council, but one sector of the stakeholders, the industrial representatives (such as the Shipyards), decided not to compromise.

Since November, EHC has [presented evidence](#) surrounding the absurdly false statements of signature gatherers in an attempt to thwart community efforts to restore Barrio Logan as a healthy and safe community. Despite the referendum efforts to defeat the community plan with money and lies, the San Diego City Council [approved the plan](#) on two separate occasions to benefit this long-neglected and historic part of the city.

By funding two signature-gathering campaigns to create today's referendum, the shipbuilding industry will cost taxpayers an additional approximately \$500,000 by putting this referendum on the June ballot. This additional cost to the city comes on top of the approximately \$4 million that the City invested in the five-year planning process that allowed for input from community members and industry spokespeople alike.

What does the struggle around the Barrio Logan plan tell us about race, class, the environment, public health, and political power?

Logan Heights/Barrio Logan is a microcosm of environmental racism. You can find it all here: Barrio Logan is community of color created by racially discriminatory real estate covenants. The populations of Barrio Logan and Logan Heights are 85% and 95% non-white, younger, and poorer than most other San Diego communities, with over 70% of residents being renters. Barrio Logan suffers from overcrowding, as more and more people are restricted to a small area. You have the encroachment of industry into residential areas. The effects of war and economic downturns disproportionately affect immigrant communities of color. We see the destructive effects of highways and bridges cutting through our community. There is a failure of government to provide services and protective zoning, and to keep their promises. And ultimately this all leads to the conversion of a once vibrant community into a land of junkyards, poverty, and substandard housing.

What is the EHC? How did this organization get involved in this issue?



The EHC is dedicated to achieving environmental and social justice. We believe that justice is accomplished by empowered communities acting together to make social change. We organize and advocate to protect public health and the environment threatened by toxic pollution. EHC supports broad efforts that create a just society and that foster a healthy and sustainable quality of life.

Since 1980 EHC's grassroots campaigns have confronted the unjust consequences of toxic pollution, discriminatory land use, and unsustainable energy policies. Through leader development, organizing and advocacy, EHC empowers residents to achieve public policies that improve the health of children, families, neighborhoods and the natural environment in the San Diego/Tijuana region.

Why should San Diegans who don't live in Barrio Logan care about this struggle? What are some of the issues at stake with regard to the community planning process, local democracy, and the relationship between corporate power and community autonomy?

Things happen because people in power make decisions that impact peoples' lives. Bad land use, outsourced jobs, freeways cutting through historic communities, distribution centers sited next to schools—all in disadvantaged areas—none of these are unplanned. It's not like smog just emanates from our culture. Specific people made specific decisions that led directly to these results.

In truth, the most important pollution control device is a functioning democracy. And the process that occurred to develop the new plan in Barrio Logan was a democratic process. The Barrio Logan Community Plan was presented to and adopted by those elected to make this decision—the San Diego City Council. But after that, corporate interests with a lot of money were able to spend half a million dollars to derail the democratic process. That is what is happening to Barrio Logan. If this can happen in Barrio Logan, it can happen in other communities as well.

Everyone who wants to preserve community control over the planning process should be afraid because

your community will be next!

What happens if Propositions B and C don't pass? What will happen to the community?

Two things can happen if B and C lose on June 3rd. The community reverts to the 1978 plan and the threat of having more industrial use in the community continues. This means that our children will still have neighbors that pollute the environment in which they live, play, and learn.

Or if Barrio Logan is lucky and the City of San Diego spends even more money to amend the current adopted plan that is required to have substantial changes, then the new version can be brought back to the City Council for adoption. But the plan in question already took us five years to put together with lots of compromises. In all honesty, I don't see much more compromising occurring if the community loses this election.

For more of our June 2014 primary coverage, go [here](#).



Bio

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