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Shipbuilders see grave threat in rezoning

By Dan McSwain (/staff/dan-mcswain/) 6:11 P.M. SEP 10, 2013

(HTTP://WWW.UTSANDIEGO.COM/NEWS/2013/SEP/10/SHIPBUILDERS-SEE-GRAVE-THREAT-ZONING-BARRIO-LOGAN/ALL/?PRINT)

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One of the businesses targeted by Georgette Gomez, associate director of an environmental health coalition is Praxair on Newton Avenue, across from several residential homes. Gomez is spearheading efforts to change zoning in her community of Barrio Logan where chemical storage and cleaning operations coexist side by side with residential complexes. — Peggy Peattie

Just when economic conditions are improving for San Diego's battered shipbuilding industry, its leaders say they are fighting for their businesses' survival in a political turf battle over a few gritty blocks in Barrio Logan.

San Diego's City Council is scheduled Tuesday to vote on a community plan update that could remove the industrial zoning designation along Main Street near the shipyards and instead allow construction of homes — and possibly a hospital and school.

The industry's neighborhood opponents, led by the Environmental Health Coalition, say that restricting industry is key to transforming Barrio Logan into a family-friendly community.

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But the prospect alarms the people who run San Diego's maritime industry, which employs an estimated 45,000 workers, pumps \$14 billion into the regional economy, and represents a strategic national resource because of its unique ability to build and repair Navy vessels.

Encroachment "threatens the very existence of our industrial base in the San Diego tidelands," said Bill Hall, chairman of the San Diego Port Tenants Association, speaking at a rally of supporters Tuesday. He cited Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Francisco and Oakland as examples of where gentrification had permanently displaced vital industrial activity along the waterfront.

The maritime industry executives have also rejected a compromise proposal from Councilman David Alvarez, the Democrat who represents the Eighth District, which includes Barrio Logan.

Alvarez said Tuesday that his proposal would keep homes from being built in the disputed area and create a buffer, but rejects the industry's bid for a "maritime-oriented commercial" zoning designation that would protect companies in the area from future limitations.

"Our role as council members is to be leaders and find common-ground solutions, and that's what I've put forward," Alvarez said, noting that both sides refuse to give ground.

If this zoning dispute seems like a big deal over a few blocks of mixed-use real estate, welcome to the inherently political world of land-use

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Everyone agrees that the existing zoning for Barrio Logan is no good. Unlike any other community in San Diego, city regulations allow commercial, industrial or residential uses on the same lot.



The result is a hodgepodge where companies in light and heavy industry operate next door to single-family homes and apartments.

But cleaning this up creates winners and losers. If the city allows more housing, this means less industry in the area, period.

Business leaders are bracing to lose next week's Council vote, expecting Democrats to line up against Republicans in a classic example of a micro-local dispute becoming a broader debate that pits business against neighborhoods.

In a letter sent Friday to Alvarez copied to the rest of the Council, industry executives said they were prepared to sponsor a ballot initiative asking voters to create a maritime zone.

Organizations face all kinds of pressure; from competitors, environment rules and shifting legal liabilities. This never makes executives happy, but they are manageable.

Indeed, San Diego's shipyards spent \$300 million over the last decade on facility and environmental upgrades.

But there are good reasons for these executives to view encroachment via rezoning as a long-term existential threat.



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Reply · Like · about an hour ago



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Never, ever underestimate the damage politicians are capable of.

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George Santamaria · The University of Texas at Austin

It is patently clear that shipbuilding is vital to the local economy and also vital to those who live nearby. Unfortunately, more residential development benefits noone but real estate developers and, in this case, environmental lawyers. The right solution, long-term is to designate a commercial buffer zone between the shipbuilders and the residential areas. That way, the residents are not impacted by a healthy shipbuilding industry. Unfortunately, that also means that for the existing residents in Barrio Logan, their days in that area are numbered.

Reply · Like · 3 hours ago



Josh Burland · University of California, Santa Barbara

As a commercial real estate broker I represent industrial tenants looking to position their business near Barrio Logan. National City has already restricted industrial uses east of the five freeway. This additional rezoning is going to make a tight market even tighter, driving up rents in the area and pushing out businesses. While I sympathize with the residents this is not a case of a blighted area being repositioned. The warehouses may be old but there is substantial existing industrial commerce in the Barrio Logan area.

Reply · Like · 8 hours ago



Jorge Orozco · Top Commenter

build the ships in some middle of nowhere island in the south pacific....those jobs can be replaced.

Reply · Like · 9 hours ago



Pat Heiny · Top Commenter

Jorge -- Yes, those jobs can be replaced. They'll go to ship builders in China and South Korea.

Reply · Like · about an hour ago



Jay Chaloner · Top Commenter · San Diego, California

Get rid of that Industrial zone you get rid of jobs.

Reply · Like · 9 hours ago



Ken Platt · Top Commenter · Works at Dept of The Navy

Peeling the onion on Alvarez one layer at a time.....

Reply · 1 · Like · 13 hours ago



Steven Greer · Top Commenter · Works at Top Quality Muncito

And this newspaper wonders why nobody takes it seriously when the editorial page wants to put a stadium on the 10th St. Terminal. Shipping and building jobs pay more than hotel jobs. Keep the jobs.

Reply · Like · 13 hours ago



John Stump · Principal at Law Office of John W Stump III

Silly boy you keep worrying about the peasants and surfs.

Reply · Like · 13 hours ago



Walter Moore · Top Commenter · San Diego, California

I take this problem seriously, are you saying the UT should not write about it because the editorial page wants a stadium someplace else? Maybe you don't live close to Barrio Logan like I do.

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