



# Baldwin Park scales back redevelopment plan

By Tania Chatila, Staff Writer

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BALDWIN PARK - City officials plan to scale back their downtown redevelopment project and leave untouched 40 homes originally slated for demolition. The decision was made in the last two weeks and announced at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

Officials say they chose to exclude the properties - which comprise about 16 acres of the proposed 125-acre project - to protect homeowners and in the spirit of Proposition 99.

California voters approved the ballot measure earlier this year. It limits local governments' use of eminent domain.

"At this point, it's the best compromise that we can make," Councilman Anthony Bejarano said. "Not every person is going to come out 100 percent happy with this project. This is our way of trying to compromise with the opposition."

Foes of the project called the move a "smoke screen" to ease pressure on a contentious proposal that has already seen heavy opposition.

"The mayor thinks he's doing a favor to the people," said James Treasure, president of the Community Alliance for Redevelopment

Accountability, which opposes the downtown project. "It's not a favor. That's the law that they are applying."

The city has been in talks with Bisno Development Co. for redevelopment of its main commercial corridor since 2007. Under the original plan, the project would have required the city to acquire 370 homes and businesses through eminent domain.

The city initiated that process in December, mailing purchase-offer letters to 81 affected homeowners, according to Chief Financial Officer Vijay Singhal. Fewer than two dozen property owners accepted those offers, though they have yet to receive any money.

To continue with eminent domain proceedings, the city would have had to pass a resolution of necessity by Dec. 1 in order to seize owner-occupied homes under Proposition 99, according to City Attorney Joseph Pannone. Bejarano said that instead of approving the resolution in haste, the council instead decided to cut those properties out of the project all together.

"It's a victory for the people who are directly impacted," Bejarano said.

But that still leaves more than 300 other renters and business owners who would be forced to relocate, said Greg Tuttle, a Pomona resident and Baldwin Park businessman who is spearheading a recall effort against Bejarano and councilwomen Monica Garcia and Marlen Garcia.

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"The owner-occupied homes are a very minimal part," he said. "All the businesses, all the renters, they still go."

Tuttle said the council could easily reverse their decision.

"There is no guarantee in anything that they are not going to turn around and change their mind," he said. "What they are trying to do is calm all the people down."

Longtime resident and retired Los Angeles County Public Works supervisor Joe Ikari said the city offered him \$369,000 for his 800-square-foot, two-bedroom, one bathroom Downing Avenue home.

Ikari, 68, said while he was tempted to take the offer - he purchase his home 10 years ago for \$123,000 - his wife was not ready to move.

"It's a relief now that I don't have to think about moving right away," Ikari said. "At least we had a place to go. For a lot of the neighbors, they don't have anywhere to go. So it is good news for the retirees."

Mayor Manuel Lozano said city staff members will work with the developer to reevaluate the project's scope and timeline as needed.

Calls to John DeClercq, Bisno's vice president and chief operating officer, were not returned Thursday.

Bejarano said while the move will significantly

change the project, officials "got the green light from (the developer) and it's not going to be a deal breaker."

"The project is still in the planning stages," Lozano said. "A lot more still needs to be done before we can say this is what the project is and this is what it is going to look like."

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