

Print Page

*Real News • Really Local*

**NORTH COUNTY TIMES**

*Real News • Really Local*

**THE CALIFORNIAN**

Last modified Tuesday, September 23, 2008 10:20 PM PDT

## VISTA: City expands redevelopment territory

By CRAIG TENBROECK - Staff Writer

VISTA ---- The City Council decided Tuesday to nearly double the size of Vista's redevelopment area by adding 1,700 acres in aging residential neighborhoods and stagnating commercial corridors.

The council took action at the urging of residents who called it a good strategy for fixing infrastructure and luring in businesses.

"When I see a room full of people like this, I think 'Oh, my God, we're in trouble tonight,' " Councilman Steve Gronke quipped to roughly 50 people in council chambers. "But I heard nothing but positive things about our direction tonight."

Indeed, nearly all who took the microphone supported the plan, and the crowd applauded the council's 3-0 vote. Council members Bob Campbell and Frank Lopez sat out the meeting because they own property within the redevelopment area.

The boundary changes will take effect 30 days after a routine second vote, scheduled for Oct. 7.

When cities designate neighborhoods as redevelopment areas, they capture most of the growth in property tax.

Typically, they will issue bonds against those revenues and provide incentives for developers or repair infrastructure.

Vista already has 2,100 acres, predominantly along commercial corridors, designated for redevelopment.

New areas will include the hardscrabble barrio of Townsite; a wide swath between South Santa Fe Avenue and Highway 78, east of Escondido Avenue; the Vista Way corridor; and a pocket south of Hwy. 78 near Sycamore Avenue.

The city estimates there are more than \$194 million in infrastructure needs in those areas, ranging from new sidewalks to better sewer pipes.

"For many years I have listened to the concerns of Townsite residents, and what I have heard over and over again is that if the city could improve the infrastructure of that neighborhood, the Townsite would be a much safer place for everyone," said Catherine Manis, executive director of

the nonprofit Vista Townsite Community Partnership.

However, Michael Booth, one of the few who spoke against the plan, said it would give city leaders "too much power."

Cities have the ability to take certain property in redevelopment areas if they pay fair market value for it.

"These three members of the City Council can take out any business," Booth said. "Profitable or unprofitable. New, old, established, successful. It doesn't matter."

City officials have said they will not use eminent domain in residentially zoned neighborhoods.

Tuesday's meeting took an unusual turn when city staffers asked for a short break midway through.

Returning to the dais, City Attorney Darold Pieper announced that San Diego County had sent Vista a letter calling the expansion plan "a legitimate use of the redevelopment process."

What city officials did not immediately disclose, however, was that they had just settled a lawsuit that Vista filed against the county nearly three years ago.

Pieper confirmed the settlement after the meeting.

A copy of the agreement provided to the North County Times states that Vista would dismiss its lawsuit if the county agreed not to object to the redevelopment territory expansion.

The county has challenged redevelopment plans before. Three years ago, it sued the city of San Diego over property tax losses due to redevelopment.

Vista's lawsuit had alleged that the county had withheld thousands of dollars in property tax revenue in recent years that should have gone to the city's redevelopment fund.

Contact staff writer Craig TenBroeck at (760) 901-4062 or [ctenbroeck@nctimes.com](mailto:ctenbroeck@nctimes.com).