

Meeting held about electing eminent domain advisory committee

Seaside residents hear about creating advisory panel

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A second meeting to explain the process of electing an advisory committee on the possible use of eminent domain drew about 100 Seaside residents late Thursday.

The city plans to hold the election Jan. 22 to elect 13 affected residents to the committee. Two others have been appointed by the City Council.

People who live, work or own property in the West Urban Village Project area, which consists of 40 acres from Canyon Del Rey and Del Monte boulevards past Fremont Boulevard to upper Broadway Avenue, are eligible to vote or be members of the committee.

The City Council approved creation of the advisory committee in October.

Ernest Glover, president of Southern California-based GRC Redevelopment Consultants, said forming the committee is a necessary part of the process of advising the city on the exercise of eminent domain, through which cities can force the sale of private property in order to develop it.

"It's also state law," he said. "The state law requires the election of a project area committee because there are a significant number of residents who could be affected by eminent domain."

The city has had authority to impose eminent domain in the area since 1996, when it adopted a redevelopment plan by merging several projects. California redevelopment law puts a 12-year limit on the use of eminent domain by city redevelopment agencies. Seaside's authority will expire in April unless an extension is approved by the council.

Glover said that if the council were to extend its authority to impose eminent domain, it would only affect about 10 percent of the city's redevelopment area. But he stressed that no decision on whether to impose eminent domain has been made.

"The committee will study the issues and make recommendations to the council," said Glover. "One of the reasons we are doing this is because the ... area is part of the future downtown commercial core of the city and it needs a lot of attention."

Once formed, the committee will meet five times during a five-week period, gathering information from residents and studying the issue before making its recommendations to the council sometime in March, Glover said.

Opposition to extending the authority has been growing since the West Urban Village Project was unveiled in 2007.

Many at Thursday's meeting said the city has been silent about its plans since former baseball player Reggie Jackson said he wanted to build a hotel and conference center on part of the project area a year ago.

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Charly Johnston, owner of Midas Muffler on Del Monte Boulevard, said he still thinks information about the Landmark project is being withheld.

"Overall, I'm not satisfied with the power they are telling me I have to impact the project, so I'm frustrated right now," Johnston said.

But the Rev. Herbert H. Lusk of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church said that regardless of how the property is acquired, it needs to be developed to bring in much-needed business to the city.

"When we look at all the cities on this Peninsula, they have all excelled except for Seaside," Lusk said. "We don't have any businesses in Seaside. (My church) is within the Landmark project, but we cannot stop progress."

Former City Councilman Darryl Choates told the crowd that he believes the Landmark project is a done deal. He said residents will ultimately have to decide who they want to sell to: the city or the developer.

"The Landmark project sounds like it's going to happen. So what that means is eventually you are going to be approached," Choates said. "You either wait for the city to approach you or you wait for the developer to approach you. It is going to happen. It is not going to happen tomorrow, but it will happen."

Diana Isgur said Reggie Jackson and Amador Hotel 44 have the exclusive right to negotiate with the city to build the project for a year.

"There is no development agreement," she said. "The agency currently has no obligation except to sit and wait until Landmark comes back with a more-packaged plan. The risk is on the developer."

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