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Public opinion sought on redevelopment plan

Subject has been a sore one in past

By [Tanya Sierra](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Saturday, December 19, 2009 at 12:01 a.m.

Following mixed redevelopment efforts in the past, Chula Vista is asking for residents' opinions before writing a five-year redevelopment plan that could include expanding the redevelopment area in the western part of the city.

Ultimately, the city is required to approve a five-year implementation plan of goals and objectives, but city officials are taking small steps to bring the community on board.

The mention of redevelopment is a sore subject in Chula Vista. Past forays include condemning several businesses in the 1990s to make way for a Scripps Hospital expansion; a failed attempt at bringing high-rise condominiums to the downtown area in 2005; a grueling anti- eminent-domain campaign that ended with a law on the books in 2006 that does not allow the city to condemn property for development; and council members suspending stipends they received in 2005 and 2006 for redevelopment corporation board meetings that were never held.

Redevelopment officials want to repair their relationship with the community and plan to ask the public for approaches before selecting a consultant to write the five-year plan.

"It's important that we use this time to find out what it is the community is looking for," said Deputy City Manager Gary Halbert.

The redevelopment area in Chula Vista encompasses Third Avenue, Broadway, Main Street and the bayfront. Officials said they won't know what the expansion area will include until they hash it out with residents, but qualifying areas would probably be between Third Avenue and Broadway.

That news did not go over well with community members who turned out to oppose the proposal at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

Earl Jentz, who bankrolled the height-limit and anti- eminent-domain initiatives, said he disagrees with extending the redevelopment area because it diverts revenue from the general fund, redevelopment has a history of problems and the city has already met its affordable-housing requirements.

Redevelopment areas are designated by the city as blighted and needing improvement.

They are generally areas ripe for developers to build new projects and are almost always associated with eminent domain — government’s ability to condemn property to make way for new development. But in Chula Vista’s case, a local ordinance does not allow condemnation for development.

Redevelopment agencies receive revenue from grants and from property taxes within a redevelopment area.

Cities are charged with using redevelopment funds for low-income housing and other projects that revitalize the community within the redevelopment zone. They also use the revenue on administrative costs and salaries.

In the past, the city’s redevelopment agency was questioned over being top-heavy.

“There has been criticism over the last few years about how tax increment has been spent and how too much was spent on administration,” Halbert said. “We have shifted that and only have three professional staff left in the agency.”

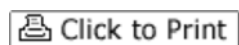
Councilman Rudy Ramirez said more should have been done to court the community over the past three years, when there have been no projects.

“I’m convinced we’re falling far short of what we could be doing,” he said. “For me, redevelopment is a political, public process because you’re moving into neighborhoods and effecting change and changing people’s lives. We haven’t yet developed that sensitivity.”

Redevelopment staff will return to the City Council in the coming months with a work plan on how they intend to engage the community and how residential neighborhoods can be improved if not included in the expansion area.

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