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## Eminent domain topic at Gold Line meeting

By Emanuel Parker

DUARTE - City officials called the meeting to get public input on proposed development around the Duarte Gold Line Station, due to open in 2011.

Instead, an overflow crowd showed up with one question on its collective mind: Would the city use eminent domain to take their homes to make room for the 20-acre development?

Between 150 and 200 people, most of them residents in or near the proposed redevelopment area, filled the Duarte Senior Center on Tuesday and voiced opposition to the project.

"This project would destroy the essence of what the city of Duarte really is," said resident Roger Medina. "It's a heart-warming community and we want to keep it that way. This project is unnecessary. We've got enough stores. The city should stay the way it is - that's the bottom line."

Duarte's Gold Line Station is proposed to be built on Duarte Road, across from City of Hope. It would be surrounded by a development area bounded by Duarte Road on the south, the Foothill (210) Freeway on the north, Buena Vista Street on the west and Highland Avenue on the east.

Officials with IBI Group, a transit consultant hired by the city, extolled the virtues of transit-oriented development, including the finding that property values are higher around transit stations.

Karen Herrera, deputy city manager, said transit developments in San Jose caused property values near the site to rise 23 percent, and a Dallas project saw a 39 percent increase in

residential values and a 53 percent rise in the value of office space.

"This could create the downtown so many citizens want," she said.

A power point presentation outlined three development options, ranging in size from 911,000 square feet to 1.5 million square feet.

Jason Golding of IBI said one option calls for taking 16 homes in a two-block area to make room for the development. The two-block area is bounded by Evergreen Avenue on the north, Business Center Drive on the south, Fairdale Avenue on the west and Denning Avenue on the east.

Vaig Tuilesu said he lives in that area. He asked city officials to explain his rights if eminent domain is used and asked if his family would have priority in

buying a new home in the development area if they're displaced.

"I think it will happen," he said.

But IBI and city officials told the crowd the development is a long way from becoming a reality.

"It's still early in the process," said IBI official Brian Jackson. "This is not a done deal. This could happen over the next 10 to 20 years or longer. It depends on economic conditions and other factors."

"This is long-term stuff," said Mayor Lois Gaston. "Funding is the clinker in this. This is just a concept at this time. The dollars aren't there."

City Manager Darrell George said eminent domain is a mandated legal process and owner participation rights are part of that process.

"If the procedure is used in the future, we would meet one-on-one with affected residential and business

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owners," he said.

A Best Buy store is planned for Duarte's Mountain Avenue and George said eminent domain was used to acquire 11 homes and one apartment building at the site.

Homes in redevelopment areas sometimes come on the open market, he said, and if the city can buy them it eliminates or reduces the need to use eminent domain.

Gaston asked the crowd if they would favor the project if no single-family homes were threatened, but some still voiced concerns about train noise, traffic congestion, high-rise tenants peering into their backyards and unknown impacts on neighborhoods.


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