



Posted on Tue, Apr. 17, 2007

RESIDENTS FEAR FORCE OUT

Jackson's hotel causes worry on Amador Street

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Angelica Sheldon moved into a two-bedroom home she bought in the 300 block of Amador Street in Seaside last November, but she could soon be forced out if a development group headed by former baseball slugger Reggie Jackson has its way.

Sheldon is one of several property owners and renters on Amador Street who say they don't want to move from their homes to make way for a 252-room hotel and conference center that Jackson's group is hoping to build.

The residents say they are worried that the city is setting the stage to impose eminent domain to seize their property if they refuse to sell. They said the city has kept them in the dark about their future on Amador Street. Sheldon said the city is focusing on how much money the new hotel will make for the city and ignoring its citizens.

"Everything has been very secretive... the way it's been handled is totally wrong," said Sheldon. "The only thing that they have told us is not to worry, but they have all of the players in position now. It's been very confusing and we think there is a chance that (the city) will use eminent domain to take our property. How would (Jackson) feel if a developer came to his house in Carmel and told him he had to move?"

Sara Isgur, the city's redevelopment project manager, said city officials have not talked to residents about the use of eminent domain. The city has asked the development team to acquire the land, said Isgur, and is not involved with acquiring land for the planned project at this time, she said.

"It's up to (the developer) to assemble the land," she said. "We are not, at this point, talking about eminent domain. It's not a project at this point."

Nevertheless, the city has hired a relocation consultant who has tried to contact Sheldon about the process.

Ricardo Ortiz, 42, bought his home last summer and, like Sheldon, he said he does not want to move. But fighting the city could be a huge undertaking, he said.

"Where am I going to move?" said Ortiz. "If they want to take (the property), what leg would we have to stand on? It would be good to know how many people actually agreed to sell. I need to find out what is my position."

The City Council earlier this month entered into an exclusive negotiating agreement with Jackson's group, Amador Hotel 44, to build the hotel and conference center on 5.7 acres at Del Monte and Canyon Del Rey boulevards.

In early January, the Redevelopment Agency received the unsolicited proposal from Amador Hotel 44, and on Feb. 2, city officials sent a letter to residents and business owners outlining what information they had about the proposal. The letter also invited property owners with alternative proposals to file a statement of interest form.

In mid-March, the agency sent a second batch of letters informing owners that one property owner, Yaghoob Hakim, had an alternative proposal but that he was interested in joining with Jackson.

City officials compared Jackson's proposal with Hakim's proposal, and determined that Jackson's proposal better satisfied the city's goals.

On April 5, City Manager Ray Corpuz told the City Council that Jackson had opened escrow to buy four properties in the area. With the purchase of the properties, the Amador Hotel team would control about 30 percent of the land on which the hotel would be located, Corpuz said.

But some residents on Amador Street said they are worried that, in the end, the city will use eminent domain to capture the remaining property to develop the project. Sheldon said she and others have already had "nervous" conversations with Amador Hotel 44 representatives and city officials.

Residents like 57-year-old Linda Mae McDade, who has rented a home in the 300 block of Amador for five years, said she fears for the worst.

"This is our home," she said. "It's pretty hard to pick up and move and leave. It's one thing to go out and build on property where nothing exists, but this will disrupt a lot of people's lives."

Eminent domain allows governments to acquire private property for public use as long as owners receive fair market value for their property.

California voters in November rejected Proposition 90, a measure aimed at reforming eminent domain laws to private property owners from government land seizures. The measure would have killed key planning and zoning laws.

A new measure, the California Property Owners Protection Act, would still allow governments to seize private property for public purposes, but it would prohibit seizures for private development. That initiative is envisioned for a future statewide ballot.

The measures were responses to a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the city of New London, Conn., could not use eminent domain to take private property and turn it over to a private developer to broaden the city's revenue.

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