



## Prop. 99's effects



10:00 PM PDT on Thursday, June 19, 2008

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Now that California voters approved Prop. 99, property owners no longer have to worry about eminent domain being used to seize their property for redevelopment. Right?

So where does that leave San Bernardino's lakes and streams project?

The joint project of the city and the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District was supposed to bring urban renewal to a rundown neighborhood where the water district plans to build a reservoir.

The 82-acre neighborhood including historic homes and businesses would be bulldozed for the 44-acre reservoir, and officials hoped upscale housing, new stores and offices would spring up around it.

They hoped to find a master developer to buy the land surrounding the reservoir and then use it for redevelopment.

That vision has been under discussion for more than nine years, and it's drawn heated opposition from homeowners and business owners who would be displaced.

A joint powers authority including the mayor, council members and water district officials was formed to make the project happen.

But under the new Prop. 99 restrictions, surrounding land may not be allowed to be turned over to a private developer.

Unfortunately, I found out that the homeowners and business owners may still have their property purchased or seized.

Prop. 99's restrictions don't apply to public works such as roads, freeways and reservoirs. Eminent domain can still be used for them.

And although the water district won't need all 82 acres for the reservoir, it will still need to acquire all of that land so the water lines, sewers, storm drains, electrical lines and other utilities can be relocated.

The land will also be needed as a staging area for heavy equipment that will haul out dirt and haul in clay during construction, said General Manager Randy Van Gelder.

After the reservoir is built, the water district would sell off the "remnant" land or put it to another use, Van Gelder said.

For example, when the district built Yucaipa Regional Park, it surrounded the series of reservoirs with grass, trees, camping sites, a waterslide and other recreational uses.

In Yucaipa, it's a wonderful place for family fun.

In San Bernardino, I can't imagine city officials allowing a downtown park to be built, no matter how well-designed. They consider Seccombe Lake Park a failed experiment and have plans to turn it into a gated community.

So what will become of the "remnant" land? Van Gelder said the water district's lawyers haven't explored Prop. 99's restrictions yet to find out what they will be able to do with it.

There's no hurry. With state budget cuts anticipated, the reservoir won't be built any time soon. The neighbors can breathe easier for a while yet.

Speaking of neighborhoods, the water district is moving out of its longtime headquarters on South E Street for more spacious digs off Waterman Avenue near the Santa Ana River.

Already, that stretch of E Street has begun looking a bit forlorn. In recent months, it has lost four furniture stores and an antique mall (but a mini-storage facility was added).

Van Gelder said the district believes it has a buyer lined up for its complex of three buildings. But he won't say who until escrow closes.

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