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Our view

Rescuing Baldwin Park

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THE 125-acre Baldwin Park redevelopment plan is facing new hurdles in a bid to revitalize a dying downtown and help rescue a crime-plagued city.

These are the issues that must be addressed by the City Council, its staff and the city's redevelopment partner, Bisno Development Co. LLC, or it's our view the project will not get off the launching pad:

A sluggish economy and a tight lending market. If Bisno is to succeed as it has with its "City Place" development in Santa Ana, it must find the money to proceed. It should reveal it is financially ready to complete both phases of the project, which would add 8,000 residences (mostly condos and townhomes), 650,000 square feet of retail, dining and entertainment, 1.8 million square feet of office space, a 300-room hotel and a 1,000-student charter school along Ramona Boulevard and Maine Avenue.

Opposition from a handful of residents (either renters or owners) whose homes may be bought and then razed to make room for the new "transit village" mixed-use project. Also, many downtown business owners are opposed to changes in the status quo. The City Council and its developer so far have not been able to convince these residents and business owners to

support the plan.

Probably the biggest challenge is whether the redevelopment agency can indeed go forward with the buying of 200 homes and businesses through eminent domain. The recently passed Proposition 99 seems to prohibit government buying of "owner-occupied" homes without the owner's permission. The city and developer must determine whether it can proceed under provisions in the new law that allow for public works projects (such as a school) or projects that would improve public safety. If not, amendments to the project would be recommended.

A just-released Environmental Impact Report presents issues in traffic generation and water supply. The report estimates an overall weekday increase of 29,309 daily vehicle trips. Of course, any new shopping center and residential complex will add car trips, so it is more a matter of mitigating these expected impacts. The Valley County Water District said the project at build-out will require 4,415 acre-feet of water - up from the current 185 acre feet - an increase in demand that will require additional supplies of imported water or well water. In today's drought conditions and water supply challenges, the question is whether the additional water demands of the project can be met.

Revitalizing the city of Baldwin Park's downtown is a necessary goal and would be accomplished under this project. Without redevelopment, the downtown core will continue to deteriorate.

In order to reach its goal, the city must bring

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together the residents and the developer must answer how it plans to overcome these hurdles. An ideal place to begin this grass-

roots work is at the upcoming public meetings on the project set for July 15 at 7 p.m. and July 21 at 6 p.m., at the Teri Muse Family Service Center; and on July 23, 7 p.m., before the Planning Commission at City Hall. Comments on the EIR are accepted until Aug. 11.

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