



Newark looks to spur redevelopment

By Ben Aguirre Jr.
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NEWARK — With a long-term vision of rejuvenating the local economy, city leaders have voted to move forward with a process they say will inject money into the community through redevelopment.

Council members recently approved a redevelopment strategy that will help the city retain more money from property taxes to invest in improving the town's physical appearance.

The idea, they say, is that stimulating the area's appearance will lead to the creation of jobs, higher property values and a flourishing economy.

"This actually will lead to \$100 million being invested into the community," said Terrance Grindall, the city's community development director.

"By upgrading these areas, we upgrade the entire community," he said.

Upgrades could include replacing streetlights and the creation of medians and parks, Grindall said.

The complex process had officials designating some areas as blighted — either in physical appearance or in regard to an economic issue that could be holding back an area's financial potential.

The blighted areas total 581 acres and include parts

of Old Town and locations near NewPark Mall, as well as particular sites such as City Hall, Newark Junior High School and Musick Elementary School. Including those additional sites could make them eligible for redevelopment grants to help improve their appearance, Grindall said.

He said he will soon be working with elected leaders to create

specific programs for which residents and business owners in the identified areas can apply.

For example, a facade-improvement program could help property owners fund projects to upgrade the appearance of their homes or businesses.

"Ultimately, the redevelopment agency will decide what projects are eligible," he said.

The plan's passage has no immediate impact on residents who live within the designated areas other than their properties will be noted as being in a redevelopment area, Grindall said. The designation will last 30 years, the life of the project.

At a recent public hearing, some property owners voiced displeasure with their neighborhoods being deemed blight because such a designation could harm their property values, they argued. Grindall said the term is a legal definition used primarily for the redevelopment process and would not be attached to any particular property.

Furthermore, he said, properties in redevelopment areas might be more desirable — thereby not harming their value — because it means the city is seeking ways to improve the area.

One key element to the project, Grindall said, is that

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the city has decided not to include the power of eminent domain.

"We cannot force anyone out, or force them to make improvements to their properties," he said.

He said it is in the city's best interest to work with property owners, not against them.

Contact Ben Aguirre Jr. at 510-353-7011.
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