

COASTAL SAN PEDRO NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

1536 West 25th Street, #223
San Pedro, CA 90732
(310) 290-0049
info@coastalsanpedro.org
www.coastalsanpedro.org

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Governing Board Meetings

The Governing Board meets on the third Monday of each month (March through December) at 6:30 p.m. at the Cabrillo Marina Community Center, Berth 28, San Pedro. The Board meets on the fourth Monday during the months of January and February.

Tank Farm to Park—and It Only Took a Few Decades!

By Bob Gelfand

It was not without struggle. More like a knock-down, drag-out brawl for a while, but we have good news to report and one or two lessons to mull over.

In our front page story, we describe one of the greatest victories of the neighborhood council system, the conversion of property controlled by the Port of Los Angeles into a public park, and a pretty substantial park at that. At least that's what we are hoping.

Once a depot for fuel storage, then a deserted vacant lot, the 22nd Street site's new construction promises to beautify the community, offer much needed recreational space, and coincidentally add to property values in the surrounding blocks.

We offer these comments in a spirit of optimism. The plans are drawn, the legal framework for environmental approval has gone through, and the initial work to grade the property has begun.

We use the word "optimism" here because the Port of Los Angeles seems to change its mind about waterfront planning roughly every 15 minutes. But perhaps in this case we can assume that the new 22nd Street park really is a done deal.

Groundbreaking was officially carried out late in 2008. In a curious oversight, the Port of Los Angeles failed to invite the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council to the ceremonies.

Perhaps they forgot, or perhaps the current administration doesn't know, but it's your CSPNC that originated the idea, developed the proposal, and with its friends and allies, fought the fight that went on for nearly half a decade.

As we report above, there were other proposals for the use of the land: The port wanted to develop it as a moneymaking asset. One group wanted to wrest control from the public and build a privately-operated sports complex. More recently, there was a proposal to provide fields for the Eastview Little League on the site.

CSPNC had one significant advantage in the negotiations. We decided on a specific proposal and stuck with it. It was simple enough to understand: "Tear down the fences, throw down some grass seed, and open it to the community."

We, of course, understand that there is a little more to building a park than that—grading and drainage and irrigation are necessary parts of the actual plan—but this 15-word proposal clearly communicated the gist of the idea.

It had the advantage of being among the least expensive of the proposals, since we are not asking for the construction of a gymnasium or a stadium.

Finally, we had the advantage of having friends and allies



among the other San Pedro neighborhood councils and in the membership of the Port Community Advisory Committee.

It's hard to imagine this plan winning through without the aid and support of the PCAC Coordinated Plan Subcommittee, chaired throughout its existence by June Smith. (Currently, Smith also serves as president of CSPNC.)

Finally, it is obvious that it took a new generation of leadership in the Harbor Commission, chaired by S. David Freeman, and in Executive Director Geraldine Knatz.

CSPNC will be watching the construction proceed and with a little luck, we will be welcoming the opening of the new park within the year. Perhaps this time, the port will remember to invite CSPNC and the rest of the community to the ribbon cutting.

Having a clear, simple plan and persevering in obtaining that plan isn't the only lesson. The proposal had to be more than just acceptable to the community as a whole, it needed to be arguably superior to the other proposals for it to gain widespread support.

We would like to suggest that the reason for community acceptance is that our plan best serves the interests of the entire community. That was a major part of our argument, and it seems to have resonated with the public.

This leads to one bit of unfinished business.

Well before our work on the 22nd Street site, CSPNC had been busy fighting off a takeover attempt on another critical property. A private organization was hoping to take the Cabrillo Bay Boy Scout Camp and run it as its own private operation. They were trying to get a lease for another three decades. We fought this attempt and won a temporary reprieve.

We believe that the Boy Scout property should be turned back to public control no later than the expiration of the lease in 2013, if not sooner.

This is, after all, prime waterfront property which would be a stunning new link in a chain of recreational sites running from the breakwater up through the Cabrillo Marina, Ports O'Call, the waterfront promenade, and the scenic pathway to the Lane Victory.

This illustrates another lesson. As our history of motions and resolutions demonstrates, we oppose turning public recreational lands over to private control.

We particularly oppose it when the private control is used to bar most of the public from entry. That has been the case for the Cabrillo Bay Boy Scout Camp for the past quarter century.

We believe that it is time to fix this problem by opening the site to public use. This position too is a simple idea which best serves the interests of the public as a whole.

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Any decrease in efficiency in the DWP project would result in correspondingly higher costs and lower efficiencies of scale. Since the SCE project only cost about \$850 million, a DWP project of comparable efficiency might be concluded for something like \$1.4 billion.

Clearly there is a discrepancy between DWP's cost estimate (not far from this number) and the estimate by P.A. Consulting that the project could potentially cost two to three times this amount.

In a conversation with *Coastal Currents*, DWP General Manager H. David Nahai explained that the overall solar plan (of which Measure B is just one part) is for 1,280 megawatts of solar electric capacity.

The 880 megawatts not accounted for by Measure B construction is to be developed within the private sector. Nahai argues that DWP has been historically tasked with the construction and ownership of electric production, transmission, and distribution, and that the 400 megawatt portion of the plan will fall within this traditional model.

He pointed out that there is a lot more area available to DWP than urban rooftops, including at least two airports belonging to the city of Los Angeles which could allow for large areas of solar cell installation.

Nahai made no apologies for the fact that DWP is a unionized organization and that the city has labor agreements with its unions. He also pointed

out that he is not at liberty to speak for or against a ballot measure in his capacity as DWP's general manager, so the conversation was focused on factual elements of the plan.

The plan itself limits participation in the construction project to the DWP, its employees, and to designated outside workers or firms chosen by the DWP. This is a major point of contention for the opponents, who point out that competitive bidding by outside firms on the required construction work will not be allowed.

Rather, according to the opponents, Measure B will function largely as a job creation machine for DWP employees, in particular the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers), who they see as the political force behind Measure B.

Opponents also point out that DWP work crews have been considerably less efficient than others in getting work done under comparable conditions, and that this will be a major element in forcing costs upward.

In spite of the fact that the measure was passed in the city council without dissent, three local neighborhood councils—Coastal, Central, and Northwest San Pedro—have officially opposed it.

There are two main concerns that led to these votes: defending ratepayers against additional unnecessary increases and the manner in which this measure made its way on to the ballot.

The measure was rushed through the

city council in only three weeks, there was little public input, and the DWP's own board of commissioners did not have time to evaluate the measure.

The proposal seems to have come out of the political side of city government rather than through the more time-consuming channels of engineering and finance.

In any case, the neighborhood councils apparently sided with the argument that there should have been more airing of the arguments pro and con before the matter ever came to a city council vote, and that proper vetting would likely have resulted in a different proposal.

Proponents of Measure B filed a legal action against the opposition ballot argument and its lead author, Jack Humphreville. A well-known neighborhood council activist, Humphreville has been a leader on DWP issues.

Although not unusual for opposing sides to ask courts to resolve disputes over ballot arguments, considerable anger among the neighborhood council community was generated by the fact that the suit, filed by the politically connected law firm of Kaufman Downing LLP, asked that legal costs and attorney fees be levied against Humphreville.

The move against Humphreville is viewed by some as an attempt to intimidate those who would oppose Measure B. On January 8, a judge ordered only that a few words alleging there were no public hearings be changed and no costs were awarded to the petitioner.



One Call to City Hall!