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Grassroots News & Progressive Views

Decertification of Barrio Logan Planning Group Election a Civil Rights Issue, Say Activists

APRIL 11, 2018 BY FRANK GORMLIE

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By Frank Gormlie / OB Rag

The Peninsula planning board is not the only community planning panel in the city that's having conflicts. Over in Barrio Logan, there's some really funky stuff going on these days.

Consider this: in the middle of counting ballots for the most recent annual election to the Barrio Logan Planning Committee held on March 18th – all counting stopped.

Why?

If you asked the current leaders of the planning group, they would've said there needed to be another election – a re-election – because activists with the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) were handing out election fliers too close to the voting.

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Mark Steele, chairman of the group, in explaining why they needed to have a special meeting to decertify the election:

“They were in violation of the law requiring them to stay back at least 100’ from the entrance to the polling place while promoting candidates.”

Steele told the *Voice of San Diego*:

“They were just over enthusiastic. You can’t participate in any sort of political work outside of the polling place. You have to stay 100 feet away. Because that violated election procedures, we determined the election was flawed and we could not certify it. Simple.”

So, on Wednesday night on April 4th, the planning committee reconvened and voted 7 to 4 to invalidate the election and scheduled another vote on April 18.

However, there is no 100-foot rule in the Barrio Logan planning group’s bylaws or is there anything in City Council policy governing community planning groups.

Over at the Environmental Health Coalition, executive director Diane Takvorian, told *KPBS* she was disappointed in the decision to invalidate the election. She said her staff hadn’t broken any law or official rules, and said the EHC will request the city to release the results of the March election. She also stated:

“We think it’s a shame because this community has been disrespected in so many ways throughout history and the community really came out to fight for the right to vote and is being shut down again.”

Takvorian has admitted EHC activists were just 50 feet away from voters, but she showed *VOSD* the planning group’s bylaws, which does not include any mention of 100 feet buffers. According to the *Voice*:

There are rules for regular elections — the ones where you choose mayors and members of Congress. But those don’t necessarily cover community planning groups. For one thing, each group has different rules about who can qualify to run. And you don’t need to be a registered voter, for example, to vote in community planning group elections — though some groups have special rules for that, too.

Saying it was about civil rights and representation, Takvorian insists:

“We want a full review of the election. We want all of those ballots to be retained pending outcome of the investigation.”

Community members have told her they will return to vote on the 18th – the next election.

Brent Beltran, a member of the Barrio Logan planning committee – one of the 4 who opposed the invalidation – told the *OB Rag*:

The residents, property owners and business owners of Barrio Logan voted. But due to pressure from maritime industry and the city our vote was shamefully cast aside. It’s just another insult piled

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on to the many insults my community has had to endure over generations.

But we will persevere, the election results will be the same, and we will get the new community plan update that WE deserve.

For context, [KPBS](#) reported:

The [Barrio Logan planners] would have a say in Barrio Logan's community plan, which has not been updated in 40 years. Currently, there is no zoning in Barrio Logan, which means homes can be built right next to industrial facilities like welding shops that can emit toxic fumes. The group has no official authority, but community planning groups in other neighborhoods can be influential, making recommendations to the City Council and city staff that are often followed.

Addressing what's at stake, [VOSD](#) reported:

Community planning groups have limited powers. If one of them reviews a proposed building project negatively, it's only a recommendation to the Planning Commission and City Council. But in practice, the groups are influential. Developers often tweak their designs and plans to appease the groups.

Even more important: Community planning groups have a major influence on the community plans that dictate zoning rules for each neighborhood. Barrio Logan's plan is notoriously outdated. It's many decades old and allows anyone to build anything in the neighborhood — welding shops sit next to homes. An effort to update the plan passed the City Council in 2013, but the shipbuilding industry was displeased and forced it to a referendum where voters citywide threw it out.

After that vote, the neighborhood got its own community planning group for the first time. Its meetings are now well attended. The city is gearing up to get another plan together and it's a top priority for all the City Council candidates running to represent the area.

Point Lomans and OBceans should take lessons from the thuggish shenanigans coming down in Barrio Logan. Local planning boards do count – and democracy on the boards does matter.

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	<h3>Frank Gormlie</h3> <p>A lawyer and grassroots activist, I was finally convinced by Patty Jones to start the OB Rag, a blog of citizen journalists, after she got tired of listening to my rants about the news. Way back during the Dinosaurs in 1970, I founded the original Ocean Beach People's Rag - OB's famous underground newspaper -, and then later during the early Eighties, published The Whole Damn Pie Shop, a progressive alternative to the Reader.</p>

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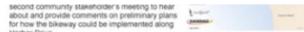
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bob dorn says
April 11, 2018 at 11:39 am

A thousand pats on the back to Frank Gormlie, and Brent Beltran, for exposing this plantation's attitudes toward one of its longest-lasting neighborhoods, one that happens to be what today is still called a "minority." Planning committees must represent the interests of the citizens they're appointed to represent, not those of military contractors and developers with the itching need to eliminate those same neighborhoods in the name of turismo.



Desde la Logan says
April 12, 2018 at 11:58 am

Thanks, Bob! And thanks to Frank for writing about the issue.

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