

Competing Visions for Barrio Logan

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In most San Diego neighborhoods, updating the plans that outline the area's future land use priorities comes down to density and infrastructure.

In Barrio Logan, density takes a backseat to the issue of potentially harmful industrial businesses operating next to schools and residences.

After a roughly four-year process of updating Barrio Logan's 1978 community plan, the city selected two proposed solutions and created an environmental review of their effects. The environmental review of both plans is in the midst of a 45-day public comment period, after which the city will resume the process of selecting one of the plans.

We've created maps that boil down the two blueprints to demonstrate where they differ and where the community has reached some consensus. The maps, including one showing the existing land use situation, are below.

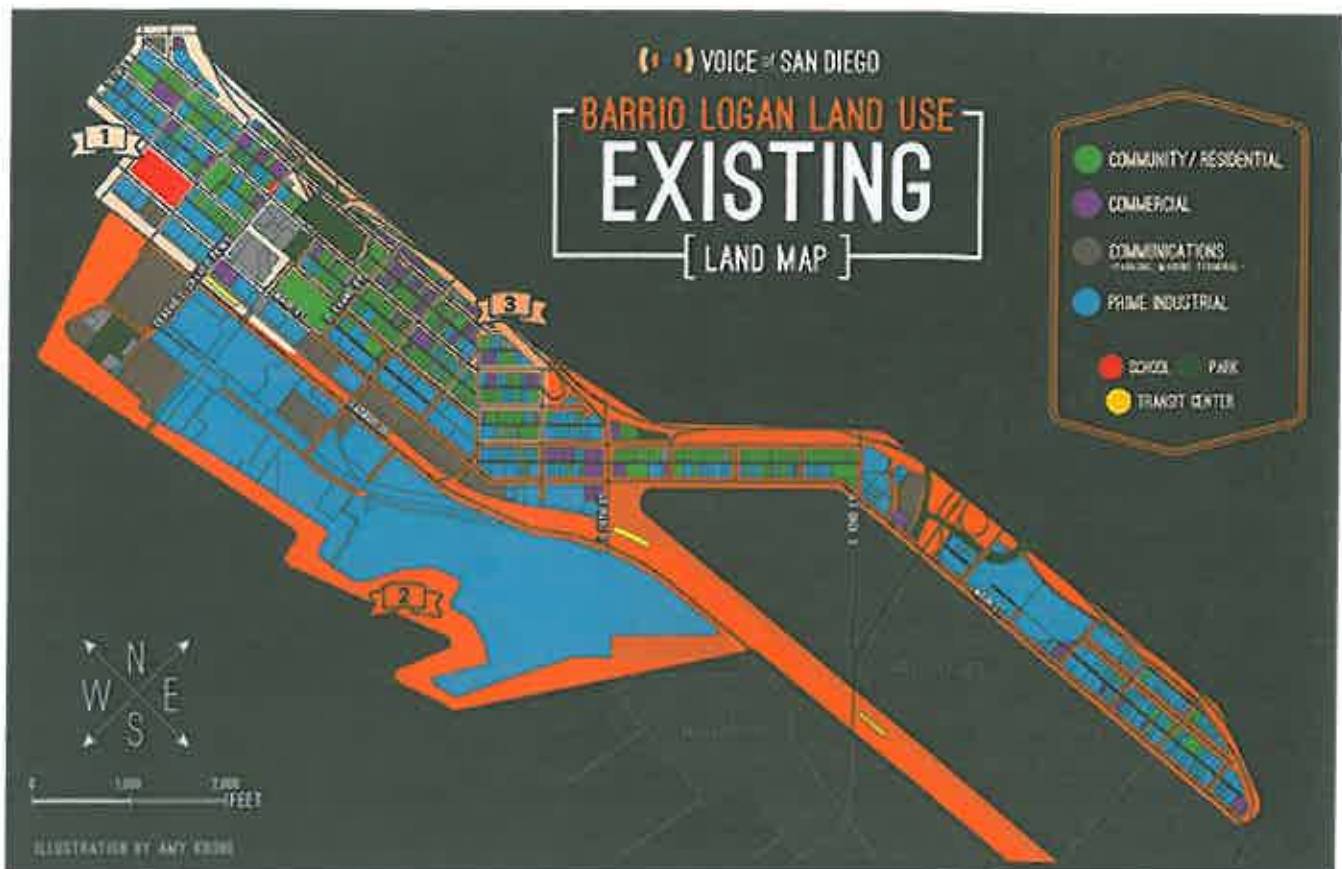
Everyone seems to agree on one thing: The neighborhood's existing arrangement is unsustainable. But there are sticking points on how to move forward, mostly when it comes to eliminating incompatible land uses in the community. Recycling plants and auto-repair shops often sit directly next door to homes.

It's an old story for Barrio Logan, and it's played out in a number of different political battles over the years. But as the city and a group of invested community members slowly move toward updating the community plan, the two proposed solutions showcase competing priorities of the community's most engaged populations: residents and industry.

Mayor Bob Filner recently said he supports the draft community plan, though he didn't specify which of the two possible scenarios he favors.

"The issue here is, can you have, or when will we have, a community plan that will allow development that is in accord with community values, and we're trying to get that community plan done as quick as we can," he said. "But (the plan) should be able to handle those conflicts. That's the purpose of the community plan."

Here's a current map of Barrio Logan. We've reduced the overall range of uses into broader categories to make it easier to understand. [Click to enlarge.](#)



There are more specific classifications within each land use category. For instance, within the parcels listed as industrial uses there's a range of types, from light to heavy and specifications like warehousing or junkyards. Here's the entire breakdown.

But a quick glance shows that industrial parcels bump elbows with residential uses all over the neighborhood. It's bad for residents' health and the growth potential of businesses.

The city is updating the community plan not only to set up a blueprint for Barrio Logan's future, but to bring it closer in line with the city's own general plan, updated in 2008, which calls for a "city of villages" development concept.

You can see the two scenarios in the two maps below (click to enlarge). We've outlined three specific areas in the community to break down areas of agreement and contention regarding Barrio Logan's future.



Area 1: Creating a Dense Urban Community

Both plans envision the brunt of Barrio Logan's future population increases to be accommodated here, in what's being called the "community village area," in the northwest, where the community runs up against downtown.

In many neighborhoods, creating dense, mixed-use environments that reflect the "city of villages" concept like this is at the heart of a community plan update.

But in Barrio Logan's case, it's one of the settled elements of the plan. Barrio Logan's overall density is going to double with the adoption of its new community plan.

The new plan also includes a financing plan for new public facilities.

"This was something that was resolved early on," said Councilman David Alvarez, who represents Barrio Logan. "It was decided upon that we needed density, but didn't want to become an extension of downtown with high rises."

Initially, property owners proposed a maximum height in this area of 10 stories. The residential community wanted a three-story limit.

Through a series of community meetings and negotiations, they arrived at the compromise reflected in both plans: five stories, with density bonuses available to developers if they provide affordable housing units in their projects.

Georgette Gomez, who with the Environmental Health Coalition is one of the nonprofit representatives in the update's advisory committee, said she was surprised to hear other community plan updates focus mostly on density.

"They're talking about protecting their character with less density," she said. "We didn't even have that luxury to have that conversation. It was: How much density are you going to take?"

This new community village area is where the city wants to accommodate density and incentivize development.

With the clarity of a new plan, city planners envision a quicker and cheaper permitting process. In addition to allowing opportunities for mixed-use development projects, the new plan would increase allowable residential density from 30 units per acre to 74 units per acre.

Area 2: Building a Buffer

Separating the community's existing industrial businesses from schools and residences was inevitably the toughest part of the update.

In both plans, the waterfront will remain a working, maritime-focused area, and the southeast leg of the community will be an industrial businesses hub. In both cases, the community village area near downtown and the "historic core" (Area 2 on the map) comprise the main residential areas.

Conceiving of a buffer between the residential and industrial areas is the biggest disagreement between the two plans.

The residential community envisions a strip along Harbor Drive and Main Street— set in dark purple on our map — of offices, retail and services that specifically service the industrial community.

For example, Alvarez said he's in discussion with the waterfront's largest employer, Nassco, to build a large parking structure for waterfront workers in the buffer zone, along Main Street. The buffer would also include office use that would allow Nassco to relocate workers currently situated in Mission Valley.

"My point of view has been the community, in either plan, is going to grow" he said. "Parking for folks on the waterfront, there will come a point where there will be a conflict because there's just not enough space for people to park. Even if you have transit solutions, you'll still have parking issues. I want to save the community from that conflict in the future."*

But Nassco's communications director Jim Gill said his company isn't involved in any conversations to build a parking garage on Main Street.

"The answer is no. I'll continue to check around, we're a big company," he said. "Maybe somebody is and I don't know about it, but no, we are not in conversation about a parking deck, so that's kind of curious."

He directed any questions on the community plan update to Matt Carr, president of the Barrio Logan Smart Growth Coalition, an advocacy group for businesses and property owners in the community. Carr didn't respond to attempts for comment.

The industrial community's favored map has a starkly different concept for a transition zone between the waterfront area and the residential neighborhood.

Their solution calls for a "maritime commercial" land use designation, supported by an area of "heavy commercial" use. The maritime use would be retail and wholesale companies catering to businesses on the waterfront. Heavy commercial would allow for wholesale, distribution, storage and auto sales.

The residential-favored map would include a "neighborhood commercial" area in the buffer zone that doesn't allow any housing. Some types of light industrial use would be permitted.

The threshold for what would be restricted in the residents' plan would be whether the business under existing law needs to obtain a permit for air pollution or the use of hazardous materials.

"Industry folks said they support the idea of a buffer, but they want an industrial buffer for the industrial area," Gomez said. "In their minds, that's a buffer."

Calls to the industrial community's other voting members, who represent BAE Systems and Continental Maritime, went unreturned.

Area 3: Preserving the Historic Core

The area north of the envisioned buffer between Evans Avenue and 28th Street is currently home to a mix of commercial and residential uses, with a stray industrial parcel sprinkled here and there.

Though the competing visions of an industrial transition encroach on the less dense residential community in slightly different ways, both plans seek to complement the area with commercial amenities.

New projects would offer both living and working opportunities, and both plans want to nurture the area's developing arts district.

The two proposals differ only slightly in the total acreage they'd provide for different types of land use. They have identical acreage totals for military use, open space, transportation, city facilities, schools, and the Port of San Diego.

The resident-favored plan gives a bit more space (33 total units) to single-family use than to multi-family use.

The industry-favored plan trades commercial land for roughly four additional acres of industrial space. Since much of the commercial space envisioned in the community plan permits residences, that plan has 569 fewer housing units on commercially zoned land.

What Lies Ahead

After the public input period, the city will respond to each comment. The draft environmental review, along with all the comments and responses, will then serve as the final environmental review.

The citywide planning commission will then ratify one of the two proposals — or it could send it back to the community's advisory committee. If it moves forward, the plan will go to the City Council for a vote.

After the City Council, the California Coastal Commission would have its say. That could stretch into 2015.

Alvarez can't publicly support either proposal before the Council vote. Filner, who doesn't have a vote on the plan and can't veto the Council's decision, faces no such issue.

"Overall there's so much overlap between the plans that it's going to be a game of inches," Alvarez said. "In the end we'll have a good product. No matter which scenario, it'll be much better than what we have today."

* Update: Councilman David Alvarez has since clarified that he didn't intend to suggest he was engaged in active negotiations to build a parking structure on Main Street.

"I'm requesting that the waterfront as a whole utilize parking," he said. "There's nothing being negotiated at the moment. There's no project. We've looked at different scenarios, but I wouldn't call anything a negotiation."

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