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San Francisco, San Diego votes shaped waterfronts' futures in June election

By Larry Sokoloff and CP&DR Staff on 17 June 2014 - 9:06am

Waterfronts constitute the defining features of the cities of San Francisco and San Diego. With the futures of these crucial landscapes at issue, voters in both cities weighed in on planning-related ballot measures in the June 3 election.

Voters in San Diego rejected community plan rezoning in the Barrio Logan neighborhood near the shipyards. In San Francisco, voters made it more difficult to raise building height limits along the city's mainly post-industrial waterfront. (Results from these and selected other land-use ballot measures are at <http://www.cp-dr.com/node/3502>.)

San Diego Measures B and C

Voters rejected San Diego's Propositions B and C by about a 3 to 2 margin, defeating a community plan update that would have restricted industrial uses in the 1,000-acre Barrio Logan neighborhood. About 5,000 people live in the mixed-use district, which has a long history of activism alleging harmful effects from nearby industrial activity.

Approved by a divided San Diego City Council in September 2013, the Barrio Logan community plan update was supported by environmental and neighborhood activists and by Democratic political figures including this winter's unsuccessful mayoral candidate, Councilmember David Alvarez.

The plan would have created a transition zone of commercial properties to serve as a buffer to separate residential uses from heavy industrial uses such as the shipyards. The buffer would have allowed existing businesses to remain. However, conditional use restrictions would have applied to new or expanding maritime supply businesses in the buffer zone. These proposed restrictions gave rise to fears that existing businesses would eventually feel constricted, and hence compelled to move elsewhere. Other goals of the plan included health and safety protections for residential areas and, controversially, new housing development. (See the *U-T* at <http://bit.ly/1n0UxA> and <http://bit.ly/1n5kV1>, *Voice of San Diego* at <http://bit.ly/RRKrdN> and <http://bit.ly/SKqTi>, *San Diego CityBeat* at <http://bit.ly/1os9h30>, and the *LA Times* at <http://lat.ms/Sodvtz>.)

Managers and proponents of industrial businesses in the area, prominently including the shipyards, questioned whether the measure was a first step toward de-industrializing the waterfront. Organized as the "Protect Our Jobs Coalition," they brought Measures B and C to the ballot as a means of challenging the Council's action. The ballot measures were phrased to ask whether the Council's resolution and ordinances updating the plan should be approved. Accordingly, the shipyard-affiliated group that had campaigned to place the measures on the ballot then campaigned for "no" votes on each of the measures.

The Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), which supported the community plan update, challenged the petitioners' signature-gathering tactics in court, but in April a judge allowed the measures to remain on the ballot. EHC then campaigned for a "Yes" vote on the measures in an effort to preserve the community plan. (See CP&DR's coverage at <http://www.cp-dr.com/node/3473>.)

Proponents of the community plan, including Alvarez and other Democratic political figures, said the vote threw out a plan crafted after five years of community negotiation, and wondered about the precedent for future planning battles in the city.

City Council President Todd Gloria criticized the result in a Twitter thread at <https://twitter.com/ToddGloria/status/474295058477248512>, writing, "Money & lies used to undermine planning & democratic processes," and later, "A template has been created to buy a result that couldn't be

achieved thru the community process."

Opponents of the community plan had argued that rezoning would lead to a loss of jobs by discouraging new or expanded marine supply businesses from operating where they could conveniently serve shipyards and the Navy. They also warned against the encroachment of housing on previously industrial land.

Shipyards employers argued that under the buffer plan, over 3,000 new residences could be built in the area. "A massive housing development in an industrial area will cause conflicts over noise, truck traffic, night time lighting, etc.," said a website for the campaign against the zoning changes. "Military experts tell us that these conflicts will threaten the future of the Shipyards." (See <http://www.abadplan.com/housing-too-close.php>.) On the San Diego Chamber of Commerce site at <http://bit.ly/1sfv13G>, similar phrases appeared as part of a more detailed argument against the plan, but put the number of housing units at "more than 2,000."

The opponents' ballot argument contended that approval of the propositions "would eliminate industrial land that suppliers need to support the shipyards and the Pacific Fleet." In May they also argued that the plan would expose more people to more air pollution by increasing housing development in the part of the neighborhood near the I-5 freeway.

Next steps for planning in the area are unclear. Local news reports describe the parties as looking toward new negotiations among neighborhood groups, business leaders, Council members, and Mayor Kevin Faulconer. For now the 1978 community plan for that area continues to apply. The Council cannot take up the same community plan proposal for 12 months but it can consider a substantially different plan.

"Barrio Logan is my home and my district, and I will immediately begin working on a new plan to protect it," Councilmember David Alvarez said in a statement after the vote. (See <http://www.10news.com/news/politics/barrio-logan-zoning-regulations-may-...>)

Likewise, Faulconer, speaking before the election, said at a press conference, "When these measures are voted down, it will be our opportunity to come together as a community to pass a plan that works to protect our families, to protect our economy." <http://bit.ly/TY3Z1r>. The *U-T* reported June 15 that Faulconer and Alvarez would meet that day on the issue. <http://bit.ly/1sktmtC>

For the Barrio Logan Planning Department page, see <http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/community/cpu/barriologan/index.shtml> The texts of Measures B and C and the text of the plan are at: <http://www.sandiego.gov/city-clerk/elections/city/140603.shtml>

San Francisco's Measure B

San Francisco voters continued to oppose waterfront high-rises by passing Measure B, which requires voter approval for any proposed building on Port of San Francisco land that would exceed existing height limits.

The port property subject to Measure B extends along 7.5 miles of the city's northern and eastern waterfront fringe from Fort Mason to the north edge of Hunter's Point, consisting mainly of piers and immediately adjacent inland parcels (See <http://www.sfport.com/index.aspx?page=2162>.) It includes post-industrial areas that are already full of new and part-built structures such as Mission Bay and Dogpatch, and also waterfront parcels along and beyond Islais Creek in the more recently development-targeted Bayview district.

Current height limits vary significantly, from "open space" zoning in some areas to authorizations for towers up to 105 feet on one parcel opposite Piers 30-32. Until now projects on Port property have been subject to permit approvals by the Planning Commission and Supervisors. (See <http://www.lwvsf.org/lwvsf-news/pro-cons-proposition-b-june-3-2014/>.) Additionally, permits from the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) are also likely to be required at the water's edge. (See <http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/permits/faqs.shtml>.)

San Francisco voters have a history of placing development controls on the city's waterfront, having turned down hotels and residential high-rises there in recent elections. In November 2013, they voted against Washington 8, a proposed 134-unit high-rise luxury condominium development in the city's Financial District. Proposition B was considered a way to widen gains in waterfront protection made in the earlier election.

The Sierra Club, which was a prominent supporter of Measure B, has posted a list of its own recent press appearances, including many on Measure B, at <http://sanfranciscobay.sierraclub.org/media/>. The official Measure B proponents' site is at <http://www.nowallonthewaterfront.com/>. They and other proponents of the measure