

Barrio Logan Residents Want Clean Air — So Stop Asking and Make it Happen

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A school bus drives through Barrio Logan. / Photo by Sam Hodgson

Children suffer in Barrio Logan because polluting businesses operate next to homes, schools and parks.

Families here live on the same street as companies like SA Recycling. You might think “recycling” means neat rows of bins for glass and cans, but SA Recycling crushes junked cars creating hazardous wastes, and moves mountains of debris onsite using noisy and diesel-driven equipment. Additionally, fires at recycling centers are regular occurrences, and SA Recycling had a large, middle-of-the-night fire in 2015 that sent toxic smoke into our homes.

We know that most people in San Diego don't have an industrial-scale recycling plant on their street, but in Barrio Logan, it's common. That's why, when the city asks us about what we want to see in our neighborhood during its redrafting of our outdated community plan, we feel frustrated because the answer is so clear.

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We have already answered the question of what we want to see here so many times. In fact, it's been such a long process answering this same question that our children are now old enough to attend the meetings themselves and reiterate what we've been saying for years.

We want clean air in our community.

Our polluted neighborhood has long been ignored. We have a vision for a healthy, clean neighborhood and we have a solution: the community-developed Barrio Logan community plan update from 2013.

Currently, Barrio Logan operates with a community plan from 1978 – the oldest in the city of San Diego. Nearly 40 years of an outdated community plan has led to a neighborhood where children are almost three times more likely to end up in the emergency room for breathing problems than the average San Diego child, according to data from California's Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development. We know that playing outside leads to coughing fits and asthma flare-ups for our kids and elders. Barrio Logan ranks in the top 5 percent of most impacted communities in California in CalEnviroScreen, the state's screening model to identify areas with high levels of both pollution and socioeconomic disadvantages such as poverty that make pollution more harmful to health.

More than 50 community meetings over five years resulted in a plan for a better Barrio Logan that was approved by the City Council in 2013. The plan is simple. It re-zones Barrio Logan – establishing residential, industrial, and commercial areas within the community so that residents, industries, and businesses can each operate safely. A "buffer zone" separates residential areas where families live and children play from the heavy industries and shipyards. The buffer zone encourages the development of a parking structure for the working waterfront workforce, maritime administration offices, and maritime suppliers that would not pose health threats to residents, and more.

It also protects Barrio Logan's historical culture and improves the community. It prioritizes developments that enhance and reflect the character of Barrio Logan, encourages affordable housing opportunities and preserves and restores older homes in the neighborhood. The plan even identifies Barrio Logan as a cultural and arts center and lays out the development of the Logan Avenue Arts District. Those elements of the plan protect and preserve our neighborhood for the people who currently live here.

In 2014, Mayor Kevin Faulconer supported the repeal of the plan. Now, three years later, we see the city proposing a plan that doesn't support the community's vision and adds significantly more polluting industries to the buffer zone.

So when city planners come in and ask, "What do you want to see in your neighborhood?" we feel insulted, because we've already given the answer. They know that our air is thick and tastes dirty when we wake up until we go to sleep. They know that we live with the

reality that our children and elders will struggle with asthma their entire lives. They know that we will never be able to breathe easily, and that playing sports or being active will never be effortless. They know all of this because we've said it. And, they know the answer, because we developed it more than four years ago.

So let's not go back to square one. Barrio Logan families deserve the plan they spent years creating. Please don't come to our meetings and ask us questions you already know the answer to. When you are ready to talk about implementing the community-created plan, we are ready to talk about what a just future looks like for Barrio Logan.

Maria Martinez and Philomena Marino are Barrio Logan residents and community leaders with the Environmental Health Coalition. Their commentary has been edited for style and clarity. See anything in there we should fact check? [Tell us what to check out here.](#)