

E-MAILED
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to: sev. Trib.

City's record is built on a shaky foundation

Ken and Carol Woods

In a recent editorial endorsing the City of Baldwin Park's plans to seize over 100 homes and 300 businesses by eminent domain, the Tribune based its support on the notion that, "the city has been successful in the past with similar projects" and that "it has a good track record of development". However, the "dilapidated, poorly built and sited shopping centers" that the city plans to tear down are many of the same shopping centers that displaced property owners by eminent domain some 20 years ago. I know from personal experience that the city's record of redevelopment has been anything but successful.

My wife Carol and I are owners of a family business, Woods N' Sons. The City of Baldwin Park seized our business some 20 years ago by eminent domain for a Sizzler restaurant that went out of business just 18 months later and remained vacant for years. At the time, when the city relocated my business to a new location, City officials told us that we would never have to worry about eminent domain again.

After our business was seized, we had to take a \$125,000 mortgage on our house so that we could reopen in another location and now we stand to lose our livelihood for the second time! We stand in the way of progress, say our city leaders again. With the help of our city leaders, a politically connected developer will acquire over 300 small businesses and 100 homes by eminent domain. If this comes to pass, I will be forced into retirement. I don't think that at our age that we can restart our family business for the third time. We just cannot afford another move.

Gail Zauss was another property owner who was affected by eminent domain years ago. Her family home was demolished, along with several other homes and apartment buildings, so that a grocery store could relocate from just down the street. Twenty years later, the city is planning to demolish the very same shopping center to make way for the new redevelopment plan endorsed by the newspaper and our city leaders.

Does the city really need to displace property owners again to build another strip mall or retail center? Given the city's record, why can't we revitalize our community without throwing home and business owners out on the street - some of us for the second time? Why should the developer profit at my expense and the expense of so many others?

The City keeps saying that we need economic growth and redevelopment, but if they can't get it right the first time, why should we trust that they can make the right decision the second time around? Perhaps everyone deserves a second chance, but when it concerns the seizure of someone's private property and livelihood, this is just asking too much.

I agree that our community is in need of improvement, but let's do it together and

do it in a way that respects the importance of private property rights.
Redevelopment does not have to come at the expense of throwing people out on
the street as has been the city's track record!

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