

Grunion Gazette Editorial
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**Opportunity To Win
In Home Depot EIR**

All or nothing – not exactly an attitude conducive to getting things done.

We've seen the approach delay, if not derail, a number of Long Beach projects. It took nearly 20 years to approve a sports park site, thanks in large part to the all or nothing approach. Airport terminal improvements are at four years and counting for the same reason. Wetlands? Don't get us started.

East Long Beach is setting itself up for another impasse, ironically right next to the Los Cerritos Wetlands, in the battle over a proposed Home Depot center. A letter-writing campaign has attempted to counter a re-circulated Environmental Impact Report that claims to answer concerns.

Developers want the center as is, with open space mitigation a spit of land a mile away and traffic solutions comprised mainly of promising to get the traffic signals more in sync. The alternative, they say, could be something like a truck container transfer center, which would be allowed under current zoning.

Opponents, mainly residents living in University Park Estates and other nearby neighborhoods, don't want any part of the Home Depot or any other retail development on the site. The preferred method of opposition is delay – a call for a development master plan in southeast Long Beach is a constant in letters and testimony.

As is usually the case in these situations, both sides have valid points. A decently planned retail center at Studebaker and Loynes is a vast improvement over the decaying tank farm there now or the industrial uses the site could be put to with little oversight from either the city or the neighbors.

The retail approach is a "higher use" both from the perspective of the city's tax revenue (higher property value and a new sales tax source) and from the aesthetic value of a landscaped center instead of an industrial use.

But any development there will undeniably increase traffic, on Studebaker, on the road that doesn't want to be a road (Loynes Drive) and the already heavily impacted Pacific Coast Highway/Second Street intersection. Nearby residents have every right – even an obligation – to protect their quality of life against the intrusion of development.

What the residents are missing is the prime negotiating opportunity the current EIR process affords. Finding mitigations – concessions where impacts are unavoidable – or affecting changes in plans are exactly what the process was designed to facilitate.

Developers want this project badly. Do they want it badly enough to pony up money to finally fix Loynes instead of just pouring more asphalt in the hole? Do they want it badly enough to reduce restaurant, retail and parking space to provide more green? Do they want it badly enough to work with the city, other

developers and the state to ease congestion at the most congested intersection in Long Beach (PCH and Second)?

Now is the time to find out. Now, not after another "master plan" process delays activity for a year or more. Now, when approval of the EIR provides leverage, not later when it becomes an issue for attorneys.

There is one condition critical to making this negotiating tactic work. City officials must give residents a meaningful place at the table. Don't pat their heads, say thanks for the thought and send them away. Give the residents the power to play their hand – acquiescence, if not approval, of the development – in return for concessions from the developer.

This doesn't have to be another all too familiar all-or-nothing debacle. There is an opportunity to provide meaningful compromise leading to the betterment of the area. It just takes a willingness to get it done.

Do it, for all our sakes.