

# BUSINESS JOURNAL WATCHDOG

## WATCHDOG CASE FILE #47

# Zoning Regulations Going To The Dogs?

Well, your devoted drafter of doggie dispatches is well rested - and very well fed - from the lengthy holiday vacation, so I'm back, better than ever, and ready to sniff out the biggest issues of 2007.

I figure it's only appropriate to start the first column of the new year discussing a topic that relates to the city's future: the Long Beach City Council's willingness to go against established land use and zoning regulations, despite some residents' concerns about traffic and quality-of-life impacts.

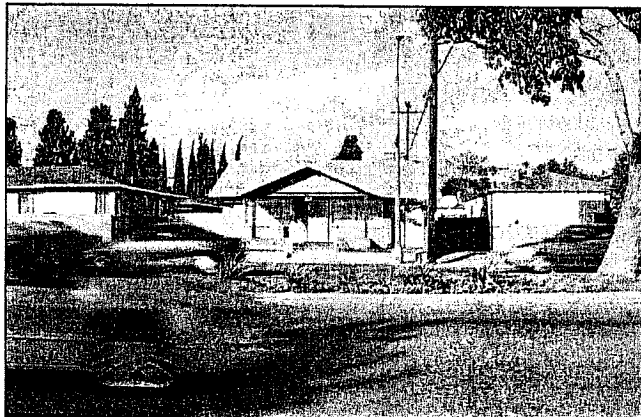
For example, late last year, a permit was approved for a storefront church - notwithstanding numerous protests that it wasn't an appropriate use for a commercial zone, could easily lead to an impacted parking situation and might prove a setback in the area's efforts to improve its retail corridor. Sure, I'll take a church over a check-cashing facility any day, but if it's not supposed to be there, why make an exception?

Let me rephrase the question: Why make so many exceptions?

And here we are: the year's barely started, and it's happened again. During a January 9 hearing, the council voted 5-3 (Vice Mayor Bonnie Lowenthal, 8th District Councilmember Rae Gabelich and 9th District Councilmember Val Lerch opposing) to approve a permit for a commercial childcare center in a residential neighborhood in North Long Beach.

Since March 2006, Tina Brown has operated Blessings Child Care - a family daycare for 14 children - out of a 1,700-square-foot, five-bedroom, single-family home located at 85 W. Del Amo Blvd. in the 8th District. Now, the center, which currently employs six people, has been approved to take a total of 31 children.

Clearly, there are a few issues with space (see photo), but the chief concerns were traffic-related (again, see photo).



The home in the center of the photograph is a child care facility known as Blessings Child Care, located on busy Del Amo Boulevard in North Long Beach. Despite the objections of Councilwoman Rae Gabelich, in whose district the home is located, and Councilman Val Lerch, the city council voted 5-3 to waive certain land-use issues and allow the facility to more than double the number of children. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

The appellant noted - and quite rightly, in my humble opinion - the inadequacy of the parking area and potential danger due to the building's proximity to a major arterial street. But my ears perked up most when he said that by granting this request, the council opened the door for others to ask for similar waivers - to which I wholeheartedly agree could cause a whole host of problems.

While it's true that Doberman Pinschers aren't known as the most kid-friendly of canines, I assure you, I do believe it's extremely important to have good childcare programs in the city. And I also know that there aren't enough options for Long Beach residents. But after watching the hearing from start to finish, I just can't shake the feeling that the decision was swayed more by emotion rather than prudence. After all, as the representatives for North Long

Beach, Gabelich and Lerch ought to know what's best for their districts.

Although Gabelich made a motion to support the appeal and deny the conditional use permit, she acknowledged that it was a difficult thing to choose between land use regulations and a public benefit. "But that isn't really the point here," she said, noting that there were already four other childcare centers in the vicinity. She also stated her desire to find a way to support the center, but asked that it not be "at the expense of the neighborhoods... 10 to 15 years down the road."

Lerch was more frank. "We must be consistent with the spirit and intent of our zoning and land use regulation," he said. "The truth of the matter is... we are diluting our zoning, our land use regulations for some emotional thing we have in our heart about kids. It is not appropriate in this area. Period."

"We need more people like [Brown]," resident Laurie Angel said to the council, "but just not on this street." Quoting the strategic plan for North Long Beach, she pointed out how approving the project compromised the goals that had already been set for the area. "Existing commercial uses in North Long Beach are typically located on major arterial roadways. The key strategy is to reorient these areas from the existing linear pattern of development along arterial roadways and instead concentrate commercial uses at a key intersection or node," she read, adding, "I think we're really fuzzy-ing up what we should be doing along our corridors."

This newsound knows that what's done is done, but what I'd like to see moving forward (in addition to, of course, some actual progress on terminal improvement at Long Beach Airport) is more consistency when it comes to following zoning and land use policies. Besides, as a Watchdog, I'll always have a bone to pick with anyone who compromises the integrity of the city's future. ■

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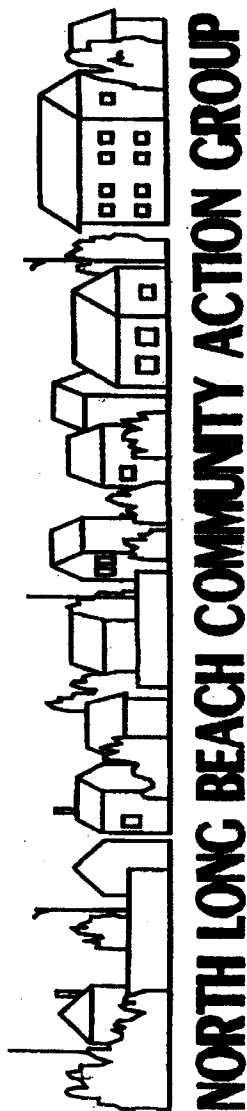
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The North Long Beach Community Action Group (NLBCAG or CAG) was formed in 1994 by concerned community members in response to civil unrest in the early 1990's. The purpose of CAG is to improve our neighborhoods using the following strategies:

- Maintain or improve property values;
- Improve the appearance of our area through beautification;
- Unify residents, groups and business owners; and
- Plan for the future.

**Mission** To be the friendliest and safest place in Long Beach.

#### Meetings

- Held the first Sunday of the month (except January, when there are no meetings and the months of July and September meetings are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday because of holidays) at 2:00 pm at the North Long Beach Police Substation located on the southwest corner of Del Amo and Atlantic Boulevards.
- Include speakers and topics of interest or concern for the residents of Long Beach. Past examples include:
  - North Long Beach Police Commander,
  - City Manager,
  - Code Enforcement,
  - The Mayor,
  - 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> District City Council Members,
  - Election or Candidate forums,
  - Redevelopment.

CAG includes neighborhoods within the boundaries of Cherry, Del Amo, to the Los Angeles River to South Street to Atlantic to Harding.

#### Projects:

- Tree planting
- Neighborhood cleanups
- Rebuilding Together
- Address painting
- Service projects

**Membership** is open to anyone residing, working, or owning a business within the city of Long Beach. Members are the only voting participants and there are no dues. Funds are generated through raffle participation at each meeting by the membership.

Associate membership is available to anyone who has an interest in improving the quality of life in Long Beach. Associate members may participate fully with the exceptions of voting and holding an elected office in the NLBCAG. *CAG is a non profit 501(3)c organization. All donations are tax deductible.*

**Dine Out 90805** CAG designates a local restaurant in North Long Beach for community members to enjoy talking and dining together held the last Monday evening of the month.



#### Information

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