

THE REAL DEAL

Newport Beach City Council sticks with housing plan over nature center

Council member previously sided with parents opposed to homes next to Environmental Nature Center preschool



Newport Beach Council member Erik Weigand, Newport Beach Mayor Joe Stapleton and 1501 East 16th Street, Newport Beach (Google Maps, Getty, Facebook)

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The city of Newport Beach has stood fast on a plan to build homes next to a beloved preschool.

The City Council rebuffed a request by Council member Erik Weigand to consider removing a 1.5-acre site once occupied by Newport Bay Hospital at 1501 East 16th Street from its state-mandated housing plan, [the Orange County Register reported](#).

Weigand, who represents the area, had responded to pushback from the adjacent Environmental Nature Center and a petition from at least 1,000 residents objecting to the proposed housing.

Staff and parents of kids who attend the 53-year-old preschool expressed concern about the impact of [“high-density development”](#) to the 3-acre campus and summer camp, which contains a stream and various natural habitats east of Newport Harbor High School.

The city’s [housing element](#), or blueprint for development, requires Newport Beach plan to build 4,845 homes by 2029. The former psychiatric hospital site is listed in the plan for homes.

Weigand had said that since the city’s housing plan contains more units than the state required, there would be room for adjustments. But neither the council member nor his colleagues approached the topic before a straw vote killed his request.

Dozens of speakers explained the “harm” posed by housing development on the school. Bo Glover, executive director of the Environmental Nature Center, said he is proud of the community’s outpouring of support for the center.

“I’m very disappointed in our City Council’s unwillingness,” he told the council. “This fight to protect the ENC is not over, and we are formulating the next steps starting today.”

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William Brinckloe, an attorney for property owner Gallant Family LLC, said it had spent \$600,000 on a plan to develop a 20,000-square-foot medical building on the site.

When the city rezoned the property last year to allow residential development, the family decided to sell the land.

“It appears the ENC wants to acquire the property and is doing everything possible to deter the development and force a sale,” Brinckloe said, adding it is “unclear how the residential development would threaten the ENC.”

If anything, he said, the adjacent housing could potentially bolster enrollment.

Brinckloe also said the owner believes the potential developer is willing to consider issues the ENC may have related to the future use of the property.

Weigand, however, wanted a housing development to be built somewhere else.

“Having spent my childhood at the ENC, as well as [having sent] my kids to the preschool, I’m convinced this housing location will disrupt the tranquility and beauty which makes this place so special,” Weigand said. “I will be looking for other options in the near future so I can help the ENC protect itself from losing its character and charm.”

— [Dana Bartholomew](#)