

Opinion: San Diego case hits correct note on redevelopment

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

The timing could not have been more perfect – or more ironic.

As the Legislature mulls Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to abolish local redevelopment activities, a San Diego judge has issued a denunciation of one redevelopment agency for running rough-shod over private property owners in its zeal to underwrite a big condominium.

National City, a suburb of San Diego, wanted to seize their property under eminent domain to facilitate construction of a 24-story condominium building. To make the seizure legal, the city declared the property to be blighted and needing to be cleared for new construction.

Taking property in that way was given broad clearance by the U.S. Supreme Court in its now-famous – or infamous – Kelo decision having to do with a similar case in Connecticut. But to exercise that power, National City still had to meet the state's requirement that it prove blight.

One property owner, the Community Youth Athletic Center, resisted and challenged the city's blight designation. The center, which gives boxing lessons to underprivileged youth, received support from groups opposed to the broad exercise of eminent domain. And San Diego Superior Court Judge Steven Denton sided with the gymnasium as well.

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