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Jan. 28, 2008: Groups march for housing, parks in Anaheim

Activists endure biting winds and rain to urge city to provide community services in new development.

By **AMY TAXIN**

The Orange County Register

ANAHEIM – Whipped by chilling winds and rain, about 150 community activists and residents marched Sunday to urge the city of Anaheim to provide affordable housing and park space in a new development slated near Angel Stadium.

The rally, organized by a coalition of community groups, churches and unions, aimed to pressure the city Anaheim to include a "community benefits agreement" in its plans for a 51.4-acre city-owned plot north of the stadium where developer Archstone-Smith plans to build hotels,

offices and retail space.

The groups want the agreement to include child care facilities, park space, adequate wages and low-cost housing.

"This is to show our strength, to give us a voice so the council will listen to us," said Jaime Ramirez, an unemployed auto parts distributor from Anaheim who joined the march.

Archstone-Smith, which is in an exclusive negotiating agreement with the city to buy the property, has met with members of groups that have been lobbying for these standards, but has not promised to follow their criteria. Archstone-Smith expects to forge a purchase agreement with the city early this year.

Councilman Harry Sidhu said the city was better off selling the site for between \$150 million to and \$200 million and then using a portion of these funds to build affordable housing and park space elsewhere in Anaheim – in large part because the Angels' lease on the stadium forbids the construction of any residences on the property.

Angels' owner Arte Moreno has refused to alter the agreement to allow any housing there.

"You cannot force us to do certain things right on this piece of property because we have no control," Sidhu said. "We have a certain lease and we will honor that."

"When this property is sold, we will have quite a bit of money in the redevelopment agency and we will take that money and build somewhere else in the city a redevelopment project," he said.

Eric Altman, executive director of Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible

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Development, said the coalition's hope is to be included in talks between the city and Archstone-Smith.

On Sunday, residents carried umbrellas and draped plastic trash bags over their clothes to stay dry during the half-hour march from St. Boniface Church to City Hall. Some parishioners joined the group after Mass. Some came from Anaheim; others from elsewhere in Orange County.

Rob Shell, a 50-year-old floral designer who grew up in Buena Park and lives in Newport Beach, said he went came to Anaheim to show his support after seeing friends struggle to find reasonably priced housing in Orange County.

"I could care less about the weather," said Shell, his face doused with raindrops. "If little things like this happen and change, it can make a big difference in the world."

Register staff writer Sarah Tully contributed to this report.

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