

December 9, 2010

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## Major Victories for South LA!

For thousands of South LA residents, December 8<sup>th</sup> marked a significant milestone in making South LA a healthier place to live. The LA City Council decided that a new Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market touting fresh food and a new format for inner-city grocery stores would be allowed to go forward at 54<sup>th</sup> and Crenshaw and also approved zoning standards to prevent the further over-concentration of fast-food restaurants.

Several studies, including CHC's **Food Desert to Food Oasis** (available on our website at [www.chc-inc.org](http://www.chc-inc.org)), have shown that South LA has fewer full-service grocery stores and more fast-food restaurants than their healthier food alternatives. Home to over 1.3 million people, South LA's full-service grocery stores average 22,156 residents. In West LA, stores average only 11,150 residents.

One of the biggest challenges to bringing new grocery stores into regions like South LA is the large, big box format and large parking lots most stores require. Fresh and Easy opens the door to a new, small neighborhood market format. While the entry of a new grocery store will not eliminate health disparities, it will provide greater choice and hopefully help improve quality through greater competition. For each additional supermarket, the likelihood of residents meeting nutritional guidelines increases by one third.

The specific community plan represents a long-fought effort on the part of area residents to set limits on the height of new construction, the types of businesses allowed and inclusion of pedestrian-friendly design standards. The 14,000 square foot store will replace a long-defunct auto dealership and provide access to the first new grocery store in the area in decades.

City Council also heard testimony on the community plan amendment to regulate the development of new standalone fast-food restaurants in South LA. More than 70 percent of the restaurants in South LA are fast-food outlets that traditionally offer foods high in calories and fat, low in nutritional value and "super-sized" portions. Health experts suggest the proliferation of fast-food restaurants combined with the lack of quality full-service grocery stores carrying fresh, quality healthy food has fueled the high rates of death and disability due to diet-related disease, including heart disease.

The motion passed by City Council not only addresses the growing concern for over-concentration, but improves the aesthetics of proposed projects as seen in other communities. The amendment restricts the development of new standalone restaurants to within a ½ mile radius of other fast-food restaurants, but continues to allow for new restaurants integrated into a mixed-use, commercial center or other joint tenant buildings. The amendment also includes six design standards for exempt restaurants to ensure compatibility with the surrounding area, eliminate setbacks along the street frontage, provide landscaping, and require screening and parking in the rear or at the side.

Community Health Councils, its Food Policy Roundtable and Food Resource Development Coalition have been advocating for more healthy food retail investment in South Los Angeles as one strategy to close the food resource gap. South LA experiences higher rates of obesity and diet-related chronic disease compared with LA County overall. The death rate from diabetes is three times higher in South LA than in West LA (37.9 per 100,000 population compared to 12.8), while nearly twice as many residents in South LA die from heart disease compared with West LA (217.6 per 100,000 vs 132.6). Establishing new opportunities for healthy food retail in South Los Angeles is good public policy, responsible planning and good for the public's health.

## **Oil Company Walks Away from Negotiations on South LA Oil Field**

Plains Exploration & Production (PXP), the Texas oil company seeking to drill hundreds of new oil wells in a Los Angeles neighborhood, last week walked away from negotiations in a lawsuit challenging zoning regulations established in October 2008 for the Baldwin Hills Oil Field. Attorneys with Community Health Councils and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) learned that PXP would not be open to a settlement that will affect hundreds of thousands of Baldwin Hills residents, despite extensive efforts to settle the litigation.

The Baldwin Hills Oil Field operates in one of the most-densely populated areas of the country: nearly 300,000 residents live within three miles of the oil field. In June 2008, a temporary moratorium on drilling in Baldwin Hills expired, and the community sought permanent zoning regulations and stronger protections from increased drilling activities. When the resulting Community Standards District (CSD) failed to meet their expectations, residents worked tirelessly to reopen the review and filed four lawsuits against County.

In August 2009, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a request from Supervisor Ridley-Thomas to direct the Department of Regional Planning to initiate a study to modify the existing environmental regulations that govern oil operations in the field. But in the 16 months since the Supervisor's motion was approved, no study has been issued, the required public hearings have not been held, no amendments have been proposed, and drilling has resumed. When questioned about the status of the Supervisor's efforts to strengthen the CSD, the Office of County Counsel replied in late November 2010 that "efforts to settle the litigation have been the primary focus, rather than amending the CSD."

In a letter to the county counsel dated December 6, 2010, attorneys for Community Health Councils and the NRDC called upon the County and Supervisors to move forward with the study and community hearings in light of the current set-back in negotiations.

The County has allowed PXP to not only resume drilling in the oil field as of June 2010, but expand

their operation despite the company's disregard for key provisions in the current ordinance. Among other things, the monitoring for noise and vibration impacts required under the CSD have not occurred nor have the air monitoring sensors promised to residents been supplied or a new flare to burn off excess gas been installed. The County has consistently maintained that it can amend the CSD at any time regardless of whether it is mandated by the court.

Baldwin Hills residents have every right to be concerned about their health and were working in good faith with PXP to allow oil drilling to continue while putting in place some precautionary measures to protect the local community. PXP's pulling out from the settlement talks is a setback for public health that the County now needs to step up and fix. CHC, NRDC and Baldwin Hills residents call on the County to take those steps to hold PXP accountable and protect the community from harmful drilling in the backyards of Baldwin Hills residents.

### **Upcoming Webinar Series**

***Closing the Gap: Making the Most of Health Reform.*** Join us to learn where we are with health reform nationally and in California, what to expect in 2011, and how to get involved. The webinars will take place starting in February 2011 and every other month thereafter in 2011. They will explore issues related to health reform from a community perspective.

Topics will include

- Medical Home Model in Health Reform
- Medicaid & CHIP Coverage Integration
- Uninsured After Health Reform
- Health Insurance Exchange Navigator Program: the Role for CAAs in California
- Public Information Campaigns on Health Reform.

A final list and schedule will be online in January at <http://www.chc-inc.org/health-reform> or contact [info@chc-inc.org](mailto:info@chc-inc.org).

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