

# LOCAL NEWS

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LONG BEACH PRESS TELEGRAM  
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## Homeless, locals vie for Navy sites

By Neil Strassman  
Staff writer

LONG BEACH — A federal law that gives homeless-service providers first crack at surplus military property is making it tough on communities struggling to rebuild after a base has been closed.

That's quickly becoming the situation in the Long Beach area, where the Long Beach Naval Station will close its doors on Sept. 30.

Navy housing property in Long Beach and San Pedro, and 17 acres on Ocean Boulevard just

north of the base, was declared surplus by the Navy in late 1992 and homeless agencies have doggedly pursued the land.

The federal departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development, along with the Navy, have a say in what will happen to the land, but the law now clearly says homeless-service providers are first in line, regardless of the community's desires and redevelopment plans.

Those who work with the homeless say the law gives them a chance to get much needed

land and operate without great debt.

Others say the law amounts to a land grab by homeless-service agencies, impedes economic redevelopment in areas hard hit by base closures and threatens property values and public safety.

"The federal government is walking away from installations and handcuffing the community (with the McKinney Act) just when these properties need to be put to productive use," said Jerry Miller, head of economic development for Long Beach.

There are efforts in Congress

to reform the law — the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act — to give communities more control over how military property is reused. An amendment to the McKinney Act passed the House of Representatives, but is now bogged down in the Senate.

• In San Pedro, the Turner Technical Institute wanted to place 600 homeless people in 144 Navy housing units on Taper Avenue near middle-class neighborhoods. Some in the community are fighting the project.

• In West Long Beach, Chris-

tian Outreach Appeal, a local homeless-services agency, was given 200 housing units on 25 acres. But after COA's project was approved, it lost its financial backer and now doesn't have the money to run the program.

• On Terminal Island, The Crossing, a church-sponsored agency serving the homeless, notified the federal Department of Health and Human Services of its interest in 17 acres north of Ocean Boulevard, potentially

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# NAVY: Homeless, locals tangle

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blocking a Port of Los Angeles expansion of rail services to Terminal Island.

Most of the naval station land will be transferred to the Long Beach Naval Shipyard when the base closes. The base's large breakwater and landfill may go to the Port of Long Beach.

## Naval Hospital site

The fight continues over the Long Beach Naval Hospital's land on Carson Street. Long Beach wants to build a retail center, a project opposed by nearby cities. Two homeless-services agencies have expressed interest in that site.

"The Taper Avenue-TTI situation demonstrates the problems happening across the country," said Ed Hatcher, chief of staff for Rep. Jane Harman, D-San Pedro. "The local community needs to be brought into the process to a far greater degree."

Some San Pedro residents say they were blindsided by the news that TTI had approval for its project. Then, allegations of forged letters and faked college degrees on the part of one former TTI official, and exaggerated claims of support from area businesses, raised questions about TTI's qualifications.

Housing on 18 of the 27 acres in San Pedro was judged unfit for the homeless earlier this month by the Housing and Urban Devel-

opment Department because it's too close to jet-fuel storage tanks. TTI has not said if it's still pursuing the remaining nine acres, but the furor prompted Health and Human Services to review TTI's application.

Often local community and homeless groups are willing to work together, said Hatcher, and proposed changes to the law now before Congress work toward that. "The idea is not to deny the homeless," he said.

A proposed amendment to the 1995 Housing and Community Development Act gives more authority over surplus federal property to local communities.

The amendment requires local reuse committees to say in their plan how the homeless are provided for in their community.

HUD would have 30 days to decide if the plan meets the needs of homeless. If it doesn't, HUD must give a written explanation to the committee, which then has six months to come up with a suitable plan. If that fails, the homeless agencies would get a chance at the property.

There's no guarantee the community gets the land, but the new law would make a community plan the preferred alternative for reuse and redevelopment of the property.

"It's a step in the direction of letting communities plan their own future," said Capt. Robert Kiesling, head of the Navy base closure program in the West.

## A big break

Homeless-service providers, who for years have scraped by, say the McKinney Act was a big break for them.

"Hey, the land's available, and we don't have any. The government's giving us an opportunity. Aren't we dumb not to take it?" said Harlan Heyer, 48, volunteer executive director of The Crossing, a homeless services group supported by 20 South Bay churches. "This allows us to provide for the homeless without a large debt."

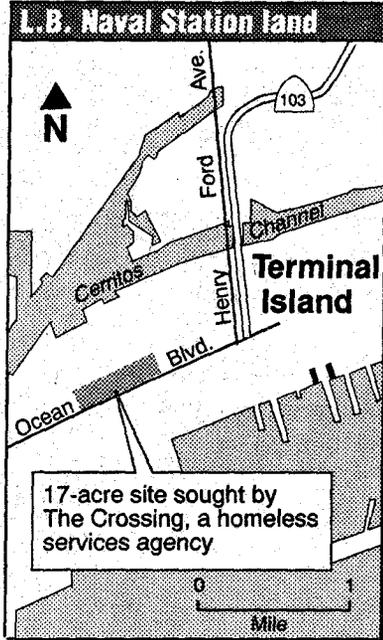
The Crossing, which provides five hot meals for 100 to 200 people a week in San Pedro, is not sure how it would use the 17 acres across from the naval base.

"It's a very attractive piece of land if it were developed," said Heyer, whose group is checking on zoning for the property before it formally applies for it by an Oct. 19 deadline.

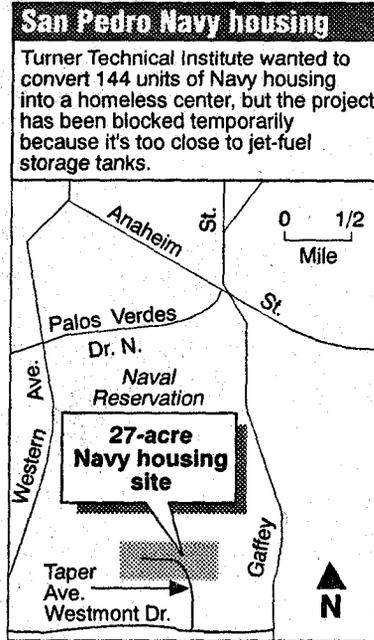
Sid Robinson, Port of Los Angeles planning director, said the port has sought that same land for a rail line for several years and never considered that a homeless group wanted it.

"We didn't anticipate the site would be positive from a homeless-provider's view, but it seems a number of groups apply to hold their options," he said.

It's not easy to get to because Terminal Island bridges limit the access. But that doesn't deter Heyer.



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"Provide something for the homeless — a piece of property and people willing to work with the homeless — (and) they will get there," he said.

**Helping the homeless**

Heyer doesn't favor changing the law. That would strip the homeless of their rights, he said.

"It's obvious local governments have a concern, but they're not motivated to do something about the homeless. Look at downtown Los Angeles," he said. "What's wrong with homeless providers getting property?"

In West Long Beach, COA is struggling to find money for the transitional housing center.

COA lost its backer when the

Los Angeles Mission withdrew from the project because federal guidelines would prohibit mandatory religious instruction.

The Salvation Army is now working with COA and has applied for a \$2 million HUD grant to help run the project.

"It's an absolutely ideal site," said Daryl Ogden, director of the Salvation Army shelter in Bell. "In Los Angeles County there just aren't a lot of places for families, and this would offer up to 204 units. It has a Head Start facility, a laundry, a community center, a place for a convenience store, and it is a secure area."

Long Beach, said Miller, has made a significant effort to help the homeless. The transitional housing for the homeless pro-

posed for West Long Beach would be backed up by a proposed multiservice center on Terminal Island, on the east end of the property The Crossing wants, he said.

"One of the things Congress is looking at is the level of support a community is providing to the homeless," said Miller. "Hopefully those changes in the law may come in time to help Long Beach and other communities."

Congressional aide Hatcher is optimistic the McKinney Act will be changed this year.

"There are a lot of people working in Congress from many areas of the country trying to get this thing through," he said.