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Letters to the editor

News

Metro | Latest News

North County

Temecula/Riverside

Tijuana/Border

California

Nation

Mexico

World

Obituaries

Today's Paper

AP Headlines

Business

Technology

Biotech

Markets

In Depth

In Iraq

War on Terror

Pension Crisis

Special Reports

Multimedia

Photo Galleries

Topics

Education

Features

Health | Fitness

Military

Politics

Science

Solutions

Opinion

Columnists

Steve Breen

Forums

Weblogs

Communities

U-T South County

U-T East County

Solutions

Calendar

Just Fix It

Services

Weather

Traffic

Surf Report

Archives

E-mail Newsletters

Wireless | RSS

Noticias en Enlace

Internet Access

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May 16, 2007

The building in the flight path

Regarding "A tale of two stories" (Watchdog Report, A1, May 13):

The easiest and cheapest solution to the Sunroad Centrum building problem is to have the builder install high-intensity strobe lights around the upper story of the building that could be turned on by the Montgomery Field tower when weather conditions demand landings from the west. This would end all of the legal fighting and posturing between City Attorney Mike Aguirre and Sunroad's Tom Story, et al, and save the city and builder a lot of time and money. Why not give this idea consideration?

JOHN CARROLL
San Diego

The Sunroad building issue is only one of many examples of dubious planning that continually crisps my bacon. But this particular bit of the excellent article by David Hasemyer ("I want us to remain spectators, not actors in this," Watchdog Report, A1, May 14) stood out: "At one point in the increasingly ugly public dispute, Jim Waring, the city's chief of land use and economic development, traded e-mails with Rick Beach, vice chairman of the city's Airports Advisory Committee and a vehement opponent of the Sunroad project. 'Do you really think that it is necessary to tear down a \$45,000,000 building because of the 17 feet? Maybe you do. I'm not sure,' Waring wrote to Beach on Dec. 12, 2006. Waring added that the more he considered the possibility of an accident, the more he thought it was unlikely."

Having been around aviation for over 30 years, I would tell Waring to get his head out of the sand and realize that, when flying, one must expect the unexpected. Since it's obvious that \$45 million means more to the city than the safety of private pilots who use Montgomery Field, I think it only fair that the minimum award for any unnecessary death involving the

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Sunroad building start at \$45 million.

Liberty Station and Sunroad are two good examples of our city government bending the rules to accommodate wealthy individuals. Jerry Sanders was elected mayor in the hope that he would clean up City Hall, but he has turned out to be just another one of the hogs running this animal farm – where all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.

BARBARA GRAHAM
Grant Hill

Thank you for the detailed articles on the disgusting abuses of power and public trust involved in erection of the Sunroad tower. Revealed are the collusion, corruption, deceit and arrogance of City Hall insiders and powerful special interest political contributors.

Listening to Jim Waring try to claim the monolith to be no hazard, when the Federal Aviation Administration has stated unequivocally that it is, or Jerry Sanders claiming he wasn't even aware of Sunroad financial contributions to his campaigns, sounds simply like more of the same old feeble mealy mouthed excuses that longtime residents such as myself have heard in this town for decades.

The article makes clear once again that San Diego city government is a labyrinth of irresponsibility that is for land development interests first and foremost, with absolutely no regard for the safety and well-being of San Diego citizens and the community at large. Marcela Escobar-Eck, Tom Story and numerous others are so clearly at ease with the smarmy insider channels that are a part of this that they don't even feel the need to make their stories sound plausible.

City Attorney Mike Aguirre looks to be more and more on the mark with the exposure of each new detail. Given the recent court decision attacking his office's right to pursue all the cases against Sunroad and Tom Story, the only question in the minds of many citizens is, just how far does this web of corruption extend?

JOHN A. TURNER
San Diego

A big fuss over a white elephant that, most likely, will be torn down in a year or so. Why? What employer will contract to move into a building that may be hit by an airplane? Only one having total disregard for employees' welfare. What employee would want to take the risk of working in a building that may be hit by an airplane? Not many, I'm sure.

Then there is the risk factor that may not be insurable, leaving the tenant with total responsibility in the event the building is hit by a plane. All in all, who would need the headache of moving into this can of worms? My prediction: The building will be torn down in a couple of years.

WALTER GREENBAUM
San Diego

The Sunroad tower situation is a clear example of a well-connected developer arrogantly disregarding public safety simply because it figured its political contributions would allow it to get away scot-free. Sunroad reneged on a written agreement with the FAA, potentially endangering San Diego citizens and their tax dollars. And Jim Waring's advice is to "remain spectators"?

As for Marcela Escobar-Eck, why on earth would she sign an agreement

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allowing Sunroad to continue construction months after the company had violated its previous written agreement? For her to say “it’s not as simple as saying stop all the work” – actually, it is that simple. If Sunroad’s half-built tower was damaged by the elements because it illegally proceeded with construction, too bad!

If Mayor Sanders had any guts, he’d fire so-called public servants Waring and Escobar-Eck and support City Attorney Mike Aguirre’s lawsuit. But maybe that \$3,600 in campaign contributions he received from Sunroad in 2005 speaks louder than the safety of San Diego citizens.

THEO CHEN
San Diego

As a showing of good faith and confidence in the safety of their project, Tom Story and Sunroad Enterprises should move their offices and occupy the top two stories of their new building. They should extend an invite to any city official who rubber-stamped the approval for the building’s development.

RYAN CAMORAS
San Diego

Sunroad’s challenge to the authority of the FAA by citing its own safety study is a recipe for anarchy. It would be like telling the cop who stopped you for speeding, “I have done my own safety study, and I have determined that it is safe to drive 90 mph on this stretch of road.” The city’s lack of moral leadership in the face of an FAA request for assistance to protect the lives of passengers only compounds the problem. In spite of what Jim Waring says, the city does not have the right to be “spectators” on this any more than did those who ignored the cries of Kitty Genovese in New York City as she was murdered. It is time for the mayor to require responsible leadership on this important safety issue.

JOHN KING
San Diego

Jim Waring’s quote, “I want us to remain spectators, not actors in this,” is outrageous, along with his comment that, “From where I sit, it is very difficult, as a nonexpert, to know whether the building is a real risk or whether this is much ado about nothing.” Are you kidding?

It’s his job to oversee development to be sure it meets all local, state and federal guidelines. If he isn’t an actor in this, he shouldn’t collect a paycheck. As to asking the question about risk, how incredibly arrogant to admit he’s not an expert of flight safety rules, but has the gall to “dis” the FAA’s expert opinion.

For years, I worked on land-use planning around Lindbergh Field. It seems not much has changed at the city. The bureaucrats just don’t want to do their jobs. Too bad for us citizens. We pay their salaries and fund their retirements. The least we should expect is to be protected by the having rules followed.

NANCY PALMTAG
San Diego

Mayor Jerry Sanders has not taken a position on the Sunroad tower? It is up to litigation to make the call? He wants to be a spectator? That’s odd because his statement on the mayor’s Web site (www.sandiego.gov/mayor/index.shtml) proudly proclaims: “Over the last several years, there’s been plenty of buck passing and finger-pointing at City Hall. No one has been willing to step forward and

take responsibility for solving problems and moving our city forward. Those days have come to an end. As your mayor, I will be held accountable.”

Dear Mr. Mayor, if you want to be a spectator, go to a Padres game. In this office, the city expects leadership from you.

MAREK L. WINIARZ
Jamul

Mayor responds on U-T lease story

The article on six holdover leases in Mission Bay Park (“Lapsed leases, lost income,” Our Region, May 15) overstates the value of these leases in relation to the city's overall ground lease portfolio and misrepresents the progress that our Real Estate Assets Department, or READ, has made on ground lease renegotiations.

The city administers 657 ground leases citywide. The total revenue from these leases during the current fiscal year is projected to be \$68.4 million. Of the 28 leases in Mission Bay Park, only six are in holdover status, meaning that they are currently on a month-to-month arrangement. These six leases generate \$280,000 per year. This amount is less than one-half of 1 percent of the city's total lease revenue, and about 1 percent of the revenue of the leases from Mission Bay.

When I came into office, there were 139 leases that were in holdover status. READ, with my blessing, has focused first and foremost on renegotiating those holdover leases that will generate the most income for the city. To date, READ has successfully renegotiated 48 of these leases.

Would I prefer that we be able to immediately renegotiate every lease? Absolutely. I also know that this is not possible. I am proud of the progress that we have made. Given the challenge we inherited, I think we have used sound judgment in prioritizing the workload.

JERRY SANDERS
Mayor, San Diego

Continuing the debate over subsidized schools

Regarding “Subsidizing schools for military families” (Letters, May 14), Roberta Garvin, making an argument against providing free preschool for the military, compared a civilian information technology technician (making \$50,000 per year) with a military E-6 doing the same type of work. Her comments on pay differences are substantially incorrect.

The yearly base pay of the E-6 is \$32,929, not \$36,000. If he lives off base, which most E-6s probably do, and has dependents, he gets a housing allowance of \$7,600 per year, and a subsistence allowance (food for his family) of \$2,800 – for a grand total of about \$45,000 not \$59,000. So he's getting \$5,000 a year less than his civilian counterpart, who doesn't have to move around the world anytime “they” order him to, doesn't have to be separated from his family for months at a time, and doesn't have to put his life on the line.

Yes, there are information technicians who have been killed in Iraq. If Gavin envies the military way of life, she could enlist and enjoy the scrumptious lifestyle of a high-level noncommissioned officer. She would then belong to an elite group of Americans who never let down each other or the American people.