

Time for last call at LB's Azteca Bar

DEMOLITION: Affordable housing will be built on the cleared site. Recession may delay the project a bit.

By Andrew Shortall Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Last call for the Azteca Bar came Saturday as it was demolished in order to transform the neighborhood around Long Beach Boulevard.

Sixth District Councilman Dee Andrews of the 6th District led the Long Beach Housing Development Company's razing of the bar.

"This is a wonderful day," said Andrews. "If we keep renovating these blighted areas, Beverly Hills will have nothing on us."

The Azteca Bar, at 1900 Long Beach Blvd., was torn down as part of the city's plan to purchase the acre of land it stood on and redevelop it into afford-

able housing.

Cost for the city to purchase and demolish the establishment was more than \$1 million.

A dilapidated auto repair business and vacant lot were also purchased for the project.

"The Housing Development Company is committed to helping revive this corridor and improve the surrounding neighborhoods in this area by removing blight and providing affordable, quality housing," said Patrick Brown, chairman of the LBHDC.

Brown said the demolition had been years in the making. He said he would also like to see the area made into a pocket park because of a lack of meeting areas and green space in the neighborhood.

Before Andrews put the first dent in the bar with a bulldozer, a number of people took a few swings into the build-

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Councilman Dee Andrews of Long Beach's 6th District smiles after helping put a hole on the side of the Azteca Bar at 1900 Long Beach Boulevard on Saturday. The demolition was part of the city's effort to make way for more affordable housing.

Tracey Roman
For the Press-Telegram

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ing with sledgehammers.

Anna Ulzewaszewski, a Long Beach resident, was one of the first to take out a piece of the building with a sledgehammer she brought from home.

"It felt good. This has been an irritation in the community for years, and this means so much to the community," Ulzewaszewski said. "That last swing was for the neighborhood."

An establishment such as the Azteca Bar can be more than just an eyesore to residents in the neighborhood; it can also attract crime, spectators pointed out.

"Typically, with a bar like this we are dealing with fights, alcohol-related crimes such as DUIs, and sometimes you can have issues with drugs as well,"

said Greg Schirmer, a sergeant with the Long Beach Police Department.

Schirmer said when the community rallies behind a project such as it did Saturday, it makes everything so much easier for everyone.

"We are at our best when everyone in the community pulls together," he said.

There is no clear schedule for when groundbreaking for the project will be, Brown said. The recession, along with the state taking away 20 percent of the funding set aside for the housing fund, will delay the project somewhat, he added.

"Now we can all move on to make a way for more affordable housing for our residents," Andrews said. "Through this we can provide the quality standard of living every neighborhood in Long Beach truly deserves."