



Eminent Domain

by David Kates

The battle between a successful business and a city that wants to take away its land may be the first test for Proposition 90.

Culver City hopes to beautify the area around its new light rail station. Surfás, a kitchen supply and gourmet food store, thinks this idea has merit. But Surfás wants to redevelop its own land.

Culver City has other plans. The city calls the blocks surrounding Surfás a blighted area and thus has the authority to take the land through eminent domain.

Les Surfás, whose store was first opened by his dad in 1937, and other business owners believe some parts of the 40-acre zone are blighted. But they have significantly upgraded their properties in the last decade.

Surfás customers like Shelley, who declined to give her last name, are rallying around the business.

“It’s a thriving store that’s a real asset to the community ... and to me it seems crazy to make them move,” she said.

The owners of the affected stores think the city wants to sell their land to a private developer to boost the tax base, at their expense.

Here is where Proposition 90 on the November ballot may help, if it passes. The proposition would prevent cities from taking private land for private purposes.

Business owners are asking customers to sign petitions to the city’s Redevelopment Agency and to support the proposition.