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## **Our View**

# **Redevelopment finale a tragedy — and a farce**

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Physicians have the Hippocratic Oath to establish a baseline for responsible professional conduct: First, do no harm. California officials would benefit from a similar reminder.

For Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) and the California Legislature's decision to eliminate 400 local redevelopment operations around the state has caused plenty of harm — much of it from the cavalier, chaotic manner in which it was implemented. How much only became clear as the clock wound down to Feb. 1, when the decision took effect.

Nor have our leaders done anything to minimize the harm they created. Redevelopment elapsed without legislative action on a proposal to extend its life to April 15, a move that would have allowed a more orderly winding down of affairs. As for the governor, whose interest in redevelopment agencies apparently ended once he got his hands on their \$1.7 billion, he batted away all such appeals as attempts to "delay this funeral."

As we've reported this and previous weeks (both in print and online), the consequences of redevelopment's sudden disappearance will be wide and deep in blocking projects in blighted areas where a slice of redevelopment money (which normally pays for itself in increased tax assessments) is often the difference between feasible and untenable. The damage is beyond the theoretical:

Schlage Lock, a hugely ambitious plan to spend \$450 million to build 1,200 homes and lift up one of San Francisco's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, depended on redevelopment financing, and failed to make sufficient progress to be "grandfathered" in. The most optimistic assessment is that this project will be delayed by at least a year; less optimistic predictions are that it will not proceed in the foreseeable future.

Cities across the Bay Area are now sitting on parcels of land where redevelopment-assisted plans were in the early stages. Many of these are now effectively white elephants, not achievable without this financing.

Oakland's last-gasp attempt at saving the A's depended on advancing plans for a downtown ballpark — which in turn depended on redevelopment financing. The city has pronounced those plans dead.

As late as this week, employees at numerous redevelopment agencies were unclear what would happen come Feb. 1 — if they'd have jobs, who they'd be working for, whether that would be a long-term arrangement or a short one.

Partial responsibility for the chaos rests with the California Supreme Court. Its Dec. 31 ruling upholding Brown and the legislators' right to eliminate redevelopment, but not to ordain a successor, set an effective date just 31 days later.

But primarily, this is a failure of legislative and executive leadership to think through a plan, anticipate its consequences and guard against unintended ones. All involved seem to have been blinded by happy thoughts of how their smash-and-grab raid on local redevelopment coffers could help bridge the state's latest budget gap.

Let's be clear: There shouldn't have been \$1.7 billion in redevelopment accounts in the first place. Or anything close to it. That there was speaks to a lack of proper supervision of redevelopment agencies stretching over years or decades. Too many redevelopment departments became fiefdoms, where favors (and money) were doled out on a political basis and where self-sustenance and empire-building were the guiding lights.

Redevelopment was a process sorely ripe for reform, but in wiping the slate clean, the state's "cure" is far worse than the disease — and its ill effects will be felt far longer.