

 2008 VOTE: CITY ELECTIONS

Developer and its staff are top donors

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SAN DIEGO – Employees of an Orange County developer have put at least \$11,500 into the San Diego city campaigns – the largest single giving bloc in this election, according to an analysis by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

The Baldwin brothers, responsible for planning and building much of the massive Otay Ranch community in Chula Vista, say they have no projects coming before San Diego officials.

But the Baldwin family companies have an interest in several pending development issues over which San Diego city officials have sway:

■ If the San Diego Chargers move to Chula Vista, development on Baldwin land is one strategy in the works to finance a stadium. San Diego is not directly involved in negotiations, but its support or resistance could affect the deal.

■ There is a proposal to rezone 700 acres of Otay Mesa land in San Diego to make it residential instead of industrial. That could create competition for Baldwin properties just over the city limits in Chula Vista.

■ San Diego city officials control as much as 40 percent of the vote on the board of the San Diego Association of Governments, which steers transportation money that paves the way for development.

An official at the Baldwin-led Otay Ranch Co. said the company is only concerned about promoting good government and that none of the scenarios is a basis for its contributions.

Baldwin employee contributions total \$11,500. The next-biggest bundles of corporate employee donations came from trash hauler EDCO Disposal Corp. at \$6,900 and Sempre Energy at \$6,400.

When the donations of family members are included, Baldwin contributions total at least \$13,800.

The totals were reached with the Baldwins and their employees and relatives each giving the maximum under city law of \$270 for City Council races and \$320 for the mayor's race in the June 3 election.

Spokesman Kim John Kilkenny, Otay Ranch Co. executive vice president, said the family opened its checkbooks because San Diego is a major force in regional politics.

"Finding quality candidates for the major player in the region is a good thing," said Kilkenny, who in 2006 was appointed by Mayor Jerry Sanders to the board of the Centre City Development Corp., the city's downtown redevelopment arm.

The brothers

From their Newport Beach corporate offices, patriarchs Alfred and James Baldwin lead a network of development companies including the Otay Ranch Co.

They and their spouses, children and employees, through at least six different company names, have donated to Sanders and other Republicans in three City Council races, and to Democrat Todd Gloria in District 3.

It's common for developers to be large donors in San Diego. But with others, such as Corky McMillin Cos. or Sudberry Properties, their business with the city is more obvious.

McMillin is finishing its development plan at Point Loma's Liberty Station, formerly the the Naval Training Center, and Sudberry has a housing and commercial project, Quarry Falls, in the pipeline for Mission Valley.

A search of county parcel records shows the Baldwins and associated companies own no major tracts within San Diego city limits.

Candidates who have benefited from the Baldwin money say they aren't aware of the family wanting to influence any particular decision. Two of the candidates said they didn't realize the Baldwins donated to their campaigns. That is not necessarily unusual, some council members say, because of the large number of donors in council races.

"It may be easier to keep up with who is donating if you're running in a smaller city," said Councilwoman Toni Atkins, who cannot seek re-election this year because of term limits.

Atkins said she has usually tried to trace collections of checks from one source to determine what city issue might be behind them.

Sanders, whose campaign received \$4,800 from the Baldwins in 2005 and \$3,520 last year, said he has never spoken with the Baldwins.

"If one of them were to walk in right now, I wouldn't know them," Sanders said. He said he has talked with Kilkenny, but not about Baldwin projects.

Sanders said his aides have told him the Baldwins have no city projects pending.

City Council candidate April Boling, who has received \$3,240 from the Baldwin bloc, said developers such as the Otay Ranch Co. probably just want San Diego to clean up its books because the city's past troubles have a chilling effect on financing for projects countywide.

"Financial institutions on the East Coast don't distinguish between San Diego and Chula Vista. To them, it's all Enron by the Sea," Boling said, borrowing a nickname bestowed on the city by *The New York Times*.

City Council candidate Carl DeMaio's campaign received \$3,240 from the Baldwins. DeMaio said he has never met them and will not do any favors for them if he is elected.

"That's the old system of San Diego politics," DeMaio said. "If some candidates want to practice that, that's great. But I'm about reform."

Three interests

One of the issues on which San Diego city leaders can play a regional role is the fate of the Chargers.

Under the scenario favored by team executives, the football team would build a stadium on the San Diego bayfront in Chula Vista, replacing the still-operating South Bay Power Plant.

The team is also considering a 500-acre site on the city's east side, though it is considered less desirable because it lacks traffic access.

Baldwin land on the east end of the city would be granted special development rights, and the economic boost would be harnessed to help fund the stadium.

Chula Vista Councilman John McCann said the Baldwin family would benefit if the Chargers relocate to Chula Vista, but it would not be alone.

"They would benefit, like any other local business entity, because the Chargers would help raise property values, elevate the positive image of the city and bring a substantial economic impact to the area," McCann said.

Kilkenny said the company opposes a Chargers stadium on the city's east side because "we don't want to build homes and developments next to a stadium."

Another place where San Diego exercises regional leadership is as a member of SANDAG, which oversees regional planning and transportation spending.

San Diego has two seats on the agency's 21-seat board, but the city's vote carries more weight than others. Some votes are weighted for population, and San Diego's two representatives are counted as if they have eight seats.

The board's decisions shape spending of transportation dollars, which can aid or hamper development.

Kilkenny said the company is unconcerned about influencing the decisions of SANDAG because funding plans for the roads and highways near its development have been decided.

San Diego officials also have a say in Otay Mesa, which is in the city, just south of Otay Ranch.

Landowners in Otay Mesa have been pushing to rezone up to 700 acres of industrial land to allow housing development. The zoning is ultimately controlled by the City Council.

The Baldwins' companies aren't among those backing the change. And if the landowners succeed, homes there might compete with those that the Otay Ranch Co. is building.

But Kilkenny said the rezoning has no effect on the Otay Ranch development. He said Otay Mesa and Otay Ranch are separated by the Otay River Valley.

"It would not be the same (housing) market or market segment. It's not on our radar screen," he said.

Kilkenny said the Baldwins are looking out for the interests of the region, as well as their own.

"This election is important. That's why we asked some of our employees to contribute," Kilkenny said. "We want to see San Diego well-managed."

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