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Why Cities Can't Stop Poaching From One Another.

It's not just sports franchises: Tax incentives to lure companies tend to help politicians, but they don't really make economic sense.

SAN FRANCISCO — Near the bottom of the lengthy ballot San Francisco voters considered this week, in this state famous for its abundant and oddball ballot initiatives, Proposition I asked voters to establish a policy of not coveting other cities' sports teams.

The measure was part apology for poaching the Golden State Warriors from Oakland, part declaration of city principles ("San Francisco Will Not Endorse or Condone the Relocation of Any Team With an Extensive History in Another Location"). Voters, who said yes to several tax increases, looked at this largely symbolic measure and voted "no."

That result was perhaps predictable; coveting what others have is implicit city policy nearly everywhere. The doctrine explains why corporations are so successful at extracting tax breaks from competing communities, why sports teams know their relocation threats usually work, why Amazon's HQ2 sweepstakes has prompted such a bloated bidding war.

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The New York Times

By Emily Badger

June 8, 2018