

## Environmentalists fight Redwood City project

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Monday, March 1, 2010



Mike Kepka / The Chronicle

*A shorebird visits the site slated for a huge residential and commercial development*

-- Environmental leaders are gearing up for a protracted fight over plans to build a 30,000-resident development at the Redwood City salt flats.

More than 90 current and former elected Bay Area officials last week demanded that Redwood City immediately halt the Saltworks project, which would bring up to 12,000 housing units, offices and retail to the shoreline.

"We all have a stake in what happens in Redwood City," said Contra Costa County supervisor John Gioia. "It's about habitat, biological diversity. The bay defines our quality of life and who we are."

The project is at least two years from a decision by the Redwood City Council and a host of other agencies, as well as voters, but environmentalists said they don't want to wait to launch the first salvo.

"There's absolutely no reason to move forward with this," said David Lewis, director of Save the Bay, which lobbied for the officials' support. "We don't pave restorable wetlands, and we don't need an environmental impact report to learn that."

Redwood City will soon start looking for a consultant to compile the environmental report, which is expected to be complete in 18 months to two years. The city plans to host dozens of public forums before making a final decision.

The 1,400-acre site at the western foot of the Dumbarton Bridge has been used to grow salt for a century, most recently by Cargill. It's the only chunk of Cargill's vast salt ponds not protected from development through state or federal deals.

Three years ago, Cargill and DMB Associates started polling residents about possible developments for the property, and came up with a plan to restore wetlands on half the site and build 4- and 5-story apartments and condominiums, parks, sports fields and schools on the remainder.

## Housing for workers

The goal is to provide housing for Silicon Valley workers who now commute from as far away as Solano and San Joaquin counties, which has led to decades of suburban sprawl, congestion and pollution, said Saltworks planner Peter Calthorpe.

"This project will put a very large amount of housing on a major transit network in the middle of our job center, Silicon Valley," Calthorpe said. "It'll be the largest transit-oriented, green development in the Bay Area."

The project will also include a waterfront park and a portion of the Bay Trail, making the shoreline accessible to the public for the first time in at least a century, Calthorpe said.

Despite the real estate crash, housing remains a critical need in Redwood City and throughout Silicon Valley, said Redwood City manager Peter Ingram.

"We still have a huge gap in the jobs-housing balance," he said. "I hear all the time from people who work here, 'Gosh I'd love to live here but can't afford it.' It's a fairly common theme."

If the Saltworks plan falls through, Redwood City hopes to meet its housing needs by allowing high-density housing downtown and along the major thoroughfares, Ingram said.

Lewis, of Save the Bay, hopes Redwood City opts for that route instead of allowing development on the shoreline.

The property connects open space preserves at Bair Island and soon-to-be-restored wetlands at Menlo Park and East Palo Alto, providing a corridor for birds, fish and mammals who roam the tidal zones.

### **Restoring marshes**

It would also provide a buffer for rising sea levels, and help bring the bay back to its historic, naturally marshy state.

"This site is hugely significant," Lewis said. "If they decide to develop this, Redwood City's entire reputation is at stake. The rest of the Bay Area will be scratching their heads saying, 'You've got to have your head examined.' "

Peter Hillan, spokesman for the developer, said the project should wind its way through the normal channels, undergo revisions and the public should ultimately decide.

"We're disappointed that (Lewis and others) choose to circumvent the process rather than have an open, public review," he said. "Right now, we're just beginning the discussion."

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