

## **East Bay leaders join in fighting for redevelopment, but not all agree**

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Oakland Tribune

Posted: 02/09/2011 06:22:25 PM PST

Updated: 02/10/2011 07:57:00 AM PST



OAKLAND -- With millions of local dollars at stake, mayors and business leaders from around the East Bay gathered Wednesday to argue their vehement opposition to the governor's proposal to kill the state's redevelopment agencies, though some support for the plan was also voiced.

Gov. Jerry Brown, facing a projected \$25.4 billion state deficit, proposed eliminating the agencies in his state budget proposal in January, saying the move would save the state \$1.7 billion and help redirect money to local schools.

In Oakland, where many of the city's biggest projects are at stake, elected leaders have lined up to demand the state look elsewhere, saying the move would be devastating. Oakland Mayor Jean Quan was joined in repeating this message Wednesday by Union City Mayor Mark Green, Concord Vice Mayor Ron Leone and several others.

"This is one of the worst ideas I've seen in the 40 years I've been in California," Green said. "And it's not a courageous idea, either. Courageous would be to actually advocate for increasing taxes to solve these budget problems."

Green also said Brown should look at the state's powerful prison guards union to pay into their pensions as well as reforming the state's overall pension scheme. Quan echoed those ideas, adding that charging oil companies to extract petroleum from the state's land should be on the table.

Some local legislators have expressed "sympathy" to redevelopment fears, Green said, but "we don't see firm commitment from anyone yet. All I know is, to any legislator who votes for this: There's no need to come to me for an endorsement, no need to come to me for money ever again."

"I appreciate the state's poor economic situation," Leone said. "But cities are dealing with budget problems, too. In Concord, we asked citizens to increase taxes. They did, and we have a half-cent sales tax coming (on April 1) as a result."

Further, Leone said, the Department of Defense is expected to hand over control of the Concord

Naval Weapons Station in the coming years, which "is going to increase the size of the city by a third, but with no infrastructure at all. Concord is going to be in desperate need of redevelopment money."

Other speakers -- from East Bay chambers of commerce, affordable housing organizations and construction unions -- cited other concerns, including a construction worker community already suffering high unemployment, and local affordable housing efforts being deeply dependent on redevelopment funds.

However, Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, who attended but did not speak at the conference, applauded Brown for his proposal. Though he stopped short of saying he endorses the plan fully, Gioia said Brown's proposal "is getting people to sit down to reform existing processes. That it caused that kind of debate is crucial as we face serious budget problems."

"I support the goals of redevelopment," Gioia said. "But in its current form, is it the most effective way to get those things done? I voted to create redevelopment agencies in my county, but I'm willing to put them on the table if it means we'll do better funding local schools, health programs and youth centers."

In addition, Gioia said, "Redevelopment funds many good projects, but some are pretty questionable. Look at Lafayette. Why would there be blight in one of the highest-income cities in our county? We don't need to be using redevelopment money to fund higher-end stores coming into town."

Jim Bickert, president of the Contra Costa County Deputy Sheriffs Association, accompanied Gioia, saying sheriff's services are underfunded as well and should take priority over construction projects.

"Shouldn't we make sure core government services are funded adequately first?" Bickert said. "In a pinch, do we want to build a bunch of nice buildings, and have people not adequately protected, children not adequately schooled?"

The details and legal language of Brown's proposal have not yet been written, Oakland City Administrator Dan Lindheim said this week.

"At the moment, there's general belief that a compromise may exist," Lindheim said. "But as distressing as it is to say we still don't know a lot, that is the precise answer: We don't know a lot."