

Contra Costa County launches waterfront development initiative

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen *Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times*

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MARTINEZ -- Contra Costa County hopes to pan its 92 miles of shoreline between Oakley and Richmond for economic gold.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously launched its Northern Waterfront Economic Development Initiative, a program they hope will lead to development on underused and vacant industrial land.

It targets what the county calls the "working waterfront," industrial land largely found in Rodeo, Crocket, Bay Point and unincorporated areas of Martinez and Antioch. Richmond has a large port, and the U.S. Army operates a military ocean terminal in Concord at the former naval weapons station.

"With redevelopment gone, which took away a huge tool we had, we are now re-evaluating how we move forward," said initiative author Supervisor Federal Glover of Pittsburg. "But we clearly need to take advantage of the amenities we have in Contra Costa to create more economic opportunity for our constituents and generate new revenues."

There was no testimony from the public.

With Tuesday's approval, county staff will inventory and map industrial and commercial lands, assess the existing marine infrastructure and convene meetings with agencies that have a stake in the waterfront, including cities, special districts, landowners and business groups.

Based on the stakeholders' input and staff analysis, the supervisors hope to adopt a strategic economic development plan before the end of the year.

"Contra Costa County's working waterfront is more than a historic artifact; it is still a vital part of the region's economy," Community Development Director Catherine Kutsuris told the board. "The continued vitality and future economic prospects of the waterfront are important to anyone concerned about economic development in Contra Costa County."

The initiative excludes parks, open spaces and wetlands, which comprise about 60 percent of the shoreline along the Sacramento-San Joaquin river channel that splits Contra Costa and Solano counties.

Once the strategic plan is in place, the county envisions an interagency working group that will collaborate and bring its combined clout to encourage development on vacant and underused waterfront properties.

The group could, for example, pursue federal dredging projects to maintain and improve shipping channels, promote long-sought ferry service expansion into Contra Costa County and plan for an expected rise in the sea level due to climate change.

Glover's colleagues expressed support for the concept, though supervisors John Gioia of Richmond and Karen Mitchoff of Pleasant Hill urged staff to take a light touch with the county's cities.

Richmond last year adopted a general plan that included its waterfront and Concord has a reuse plan for the old naval weapons station, and those visions may or may not dovetail with increased waterfront activity, they said.

Because the initiative still is in its early stages, the county hasn't yet identified how much it will cost. Further details will come back to a supervisors' subcommittee next month.

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