

Guest Commentary: Federal Glover: Northern Waterfront development a priority

By Federal Glover For the Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

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Back in 2010, as soon as I learned what the configuration of my new district might be, I got excited because of the possibility of having a major economic impact on Contra Costa County became clearer to me.

I asked county staff to start a planning process that would take care of the county's greatest natural resource. They immediately grasped the potential and began assessing the attributes of the north shore that might be attractive to economic development.

The Board of Supervisors approved the Northern Waterfront Development Initiative Feb. 26.

My new District 5 spans the north coast of the county, from Pinole to Antioch. It is at the nexus of the Delta and the bay.

With the exception of Chevron, the new District 5 boundaries include almost all of the major manufacturing sites in the county: refineries for oil and sugar, the USS-POSCO steel mill and Dow Chemical and all their associated industries and spinoffs.

The Northern Waterfront encompasses 92 miles of shoreline, most of it in District 5. Sixty-one percent of the shoreline, is devoted to open space, wetland or parks. It is where the Bay Trail ends and where the California Delta Trail begins, where salt water from the bay and freshwater from the Delta meet.

Small communities like Rodeo, Crockett and Port Costa line its shores as do the cities of Pinole, Hercules, Pittsburg and Antioch and it includes Martinez, the center of county government.

It is here in the early part of the 20th century where the county first gained its economic muscle as industries took advantage of the rail lines and waterways to transport its products to other parts of the country and eventually to the world.

The northern waterfront is connected by Highway 4, which is undergoing vast improvements on its eastern end and with the possibility of extending all the way to Tracy through Highway 239, opening up the back door of the county to the Central Valley, Interstate 5 and all the markets that it connects. Railroads serving industry, commerce and passengers follow the shoreline and connect the Bay Area with all points east, north and south.

The county report was presented by Catherine Kutsuris, director of the Department of Conservation and Development. She said it is important to recognize that the waterfront is still a vital part of the county's economy and will continue to play a major role in the county's economy.

The Northern Waterfront Economic Development Initiative would include sponsoring a forum attended by all the stakeholders on the "working waterfront" which, significantly, excludes the open space and parklands that are protected from industrial development.

Out of that forum and the creation of a working group, would come a strategic plan that would come back to the supervisors by the end of this year. We want to know if the stakeholders can work together as a region that could benefit them individually and collectively.

We want to know if they can help develop a strategic plan that would improve the waterfront as an economic engine for the benefit of the entire county. Perhaps there are some common projects that would benefit the entire waterfront. That's what we want to find out. I know that any request for funding is made stronger if we work as a region rather than individual entities.

Our effort is already being enhanced by the San Francisco Free Trade Zone's recent request to expand its boundaries

to include Contra Costa County. If their request is approved, the trade zone's tax incentives would be attractive for foreign trade partners and give a major shot in the arm for the county's economy.

Already, the county's Workforce Development and the Contra Costa Community College District received a multiyear grant to develop programs that would enhance job training for local industries and businesses.

As we start to come out of this recession, it is important that we take proactive steps that will help stimulate our local and regional economy, that we position ourselves to move quickly on any opportunities that come our way and we utilize our assets -- especially the Northern Waterfront -- to become a magnet for new businesses and enhance those businesses who are already here.

Contra Costa will be stronger if private enterprise and innovators, along with public agencies and all levels of government take those steps together.

Federal Glover represents District 5 on the county Board of Supervisors. Reach him at district5@bos.cccounty.us.