

Enviro fight over waterfront project

BCDC collides with Saltworks

BY J.K. DINEEN

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The Bay Conservation and Development Commission is putting the final touches on a controversial plan to protect Bay Area communities from rising water levels caused by global warming.

But while the policy debate is largely abstract at this point, there is one project for which the BCDC plan has become something of a proxy battle: the proposed Saltworks project in Redwood City.

In the second half of 2010, DMB, the developer of the Saltworks, spent \$230,000 on lobbyists to influence the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. David Smith, executive vice presi-

BCDC: Developers are facing opponents of development in low-lying areas

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dent of DMB, said the lobbying money reflects the need to keep informed on all BCDC activity.

"We are a large company and we have a lot of interests and are exploring interests throughout the Bay Area. (Saltworks) is just one project potentially influenced by the BCDC policy," said Smith.

On the other side of the debate, DMB's biggest nemesis, the environmental group Save The Bay, has been pushing for the BCDC plan to discourage all development in low-lying areas susceptible to seawater levels rising, a policy that could be a death knell for the Redwood City salt flats project.

Save the Bay Executive Director David Lewis said the DMB lobbying was "unprecedented, as far as I know, on any policy issue before BCDC, where there is ample opportunity through the public process for input."

While the Bay Conservation and Development Commission plan doesn't specifically mention the Saltworks, the proposed 1,400-acre salt flats redevelopment is very much in the background

of much of the debate, according to one BCDC Commissioner, who declined to be named because he is trying to remain neutral on the issues.

"It's a fall-on-your-sword case for Save The Bay and a fall-on-your-sword case for DMB," he said. "If that were off the table, I don't think you would have many cases where this would be an issue."

The BCDC, a state agency, spent than two years drafting the plan, which would discourage or ban development on vulnerable waterfront areas in an effort to



Randolph

prevent flooding, protect wildlife and create buffer zones as seas rise in the coming decades. For the past six months BCDC staff has been meeting with business groups and environmental groups to come up with a plan that protects important habitats and wetlands, while still allowing shoreline development when appropriate.

The group's chairman, Sean Randolph, said they are close to compromises on

several of the points. The new plan will make fewer references to a state plan for dealing with climate change that business groups find too anti-development. Randolph said the new plan will offer "an appropriate balance" between discouraging development in some cases and allowing development on a case-by-case basis.

Perhaps the most contentious points related to the definition of infill development, which developers feel should be encouraged because it creates transit-oriented housing and commercial development that gets people out of their cars.

Gabriel Metcalf, executive director of the think tank San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, said that projects in which developers are proposing to build and pay for new transit connections should absolutely be considered infill. "We absolutely count future transit as long as we have reasonable certainty that it will exist," said Metcalf.

The Nature Conservancy's coastal proj-



Metcalf

ect director, Sarah Newkirk, who has advised BCDC on the proposal, warned against too broad a definition of infill. Opponents of the Saltworks project do not consider it infill, though the developers plan to build public transit connecting the area.

"Beware of this," said Newkirk. "Beware of codifying sprawl under the guise of infill."

SPUR recently issued an in-depth report on how the Bay Area should tackle climate change, and Metcalf said the issue goes far beyond whether the salt flats in Redwood City are developed.

"For some, this is a proxy war about Saltworks, but for SPUR this is a much bigger issue and we want to get the policy right for all the developments we don't know about yet," said Metcalf.

"It would be a mistake to be overly focused on one project. Any area low-lying on the edge of the bay has to start preparing for sea water rise. We face very little risk of preparing too soon for climate change, and our risk is in the other direction of acting too slowly."