

# Save the moonscape by the Bay?

*A smart-growth plan runs up against environmental activists in Silicon Valley*

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The redevelopment of the Redwood City Saltworks is one of the biggest San Francisco Bay area land-use projects to be proposed in decades. At 8,000 to 12,000 housing units, plus a million square feet of offices, retail, and civic buildings on 1,433 acres, the industrial redevelopment would house more people than Mission Bay in San Francisco, a major endeavor currently under construction.

The Saltworks is also shaping up as a battle between the developers — DMB Associates and land-owner Cargill — and environmentalists who advocate restoring the site to a completely natural state.

The property as it now exists is far from being a neighborhood amenity. The site has been used for industrial salt production since 1901. Architect Peter Calthorpe, whose firm is teaming with ROMA Design Group on the plan, aptly describes the century-old Saltworks as a “moonscape” of salt ponds. The plan calls for 436 acres of restored wetlands, 368 acres of parks and trails, and 629 acres of new urban, transit-oriented development in the form of mixed-use buildings, townhouses, and apartments. Fifteen percent of the residential units would meet affordability standards.

One of the most vocal opponents, David Lewis of the environmental group Save the Bay, claims the site is not smart growth because it is not located near an existing rail station. But there are three transit-oriented aspects of the plan. A ferry terminal adjacent to the site, planned by public agencies, would offer connections to San Francisco and the East Bay. Also, the developers propose to help build a streetcar line that would connect the new community to a CalTrain commuter rail station a mile away and to downtown Redwood City. Finally, high-speed rail is planned to go through Redwood City, and Calthorpe believes the streetcar will be able to connect to that as well — linking residents to points in central and southern California. The streetcar would also connect an existing suburban-style of-

fice park, adjacent to the Saltworks site, to Caltrain.

## A NEED FOR HOUSING

One argument against restoring the site entirely to wetlands is that there is a need for housing in Silicon Valley that many expect will grow in coming decades. Smaller urban infill sites will likely not be able to accommodate all of the needed housing, says Calthorpe. “More than 40,000 out-of-town commuters drive into Redwood City to work every day,” Calthorpe wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “A major goal of the Saltworks plan is to get many of these distant suburban commuters off the roads and out of their cars by providing them with a local place to live and good transit alternates.”

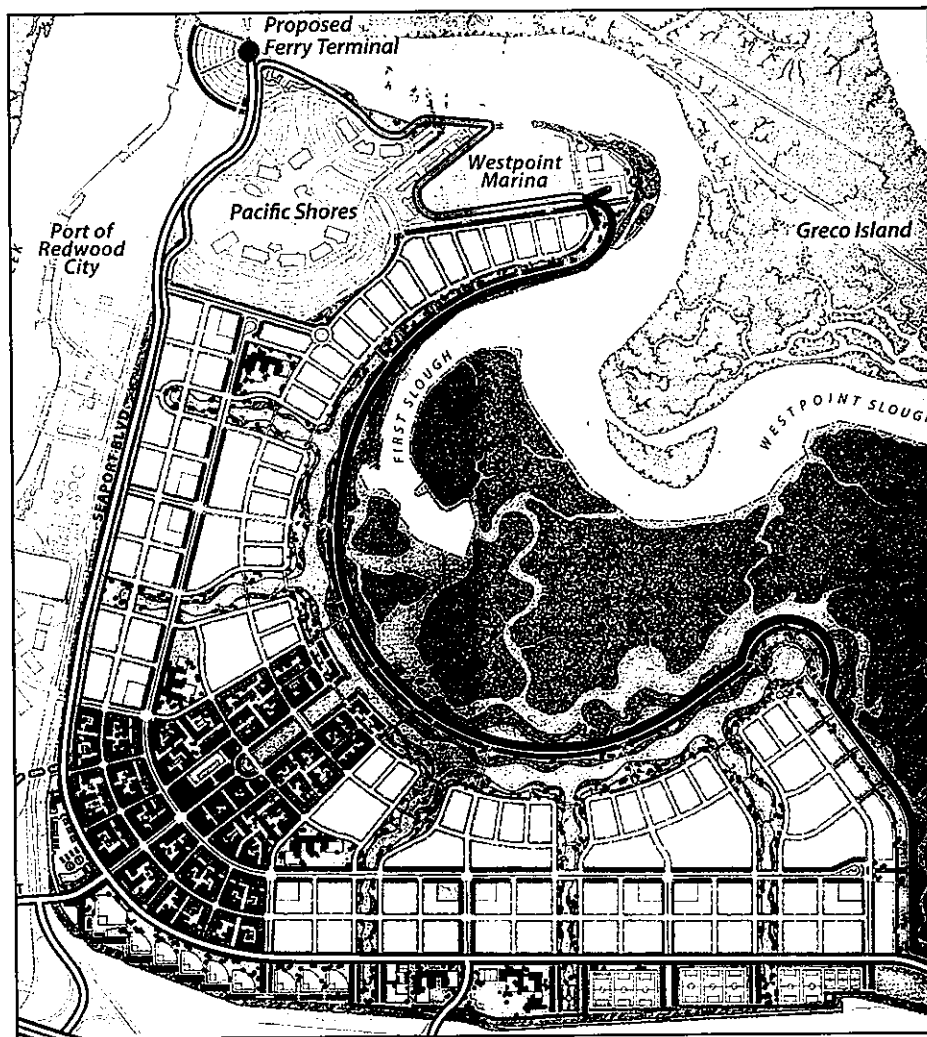
It is not clear that the “return-to-nature” option is on the table, nor is it clear

who would pay for it. “The reality is, the money is going to have to come from the corporate world, and you have to give the corporate world something to work with,” Lou Covey, president of Citizens for Sustainable Redwood City, told the *San Francisco Business Times*.

Covey, who lives near the site, told the newspaper his neighborhood needs the parks, recreational facilities, and additional affordable housing that the project would provide. A referendum last November that would have stopped the project was rejected.

Another criticism made by opponents is that the low-lying site should not be built upon because of anticipated sea level rises due to global warming. Calthorpe responds that Redwood City will need a levee and flood-control system “with or without the project” to protect existing low-lying development, and the Saltworks development could pay for a significant portion of that system.

The Saltworks plan restores wetlands on 30 percent of the site.



Developers propose a levee topped by a three-mile-long semicircular trail overlooking restored wetlands.

Based in Arizona, DMB is already developing some very large projects, including a 3,200-acre redevelopment of a former General Motors Proving Ground site in Mesa, which incorporates

new urban design features.

The Redwood City Council decided in August to hire consultants to study the Saltworks proposal. Submitted last May, the project is facing an entitlement process — including a required amendment of the city plan — that could take two years, according to the *Business Times*. ♦

## Prince's Foundation takes the heat

*A government commission is examining whether Charles's architectural activism violates Britain's rules.*

In Britain, Prince Charles has often been attacked for his strong advocacy of traditional architecture and town planning. Modernists have resented his point of view. Critics of the monarchy have objected to the very idea that an heir to the throne should involve himself in public issues.

All of this ratcheted up in August when the Charity Commission announced it is investigating whether the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment is acting, in effect, as Charles's "private lobbying firm." The government regulatory agency asked the foundation to explain its relation to the Prince of Wales, amid concern that the foundation had exceeded its prerogatives as a registered charity by reportedly trying to influence a number of planning decisions.

The Charity Commission launched the inquiry after receiving a complaint from Republic, an anti-monarchy group. This came shortly after *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, reported that in 2005 the prince had tried to persuade the developer of a 560,000 sq. ft. office and shopping complex next to London's St. Paul's Cathedral to drop the project's modernist architect, Jean Nouvel, and instead employ one of the more traditional designers preferred by Charles. The prince apparently was concerned about the new complex's effect on the landmark St. Paul's, designed in the 1670s by the great Christopher Wren.

Republic also accused Charles of "single-handedly destroying" the planned Chelsea Barracks development in London — 548 apartments in steel and glass towers — by complaining to the site's owner, the Qatari royal family,

about the "modernist" look of the buildings that architect Richard Rogers was proposing. The prince called the design "unsympathetic and unsuitable" and suggested that the Qatari ruler consider an alternative design by the classicist Quinlan Terry. In June the owner abandoned the Rogers plan, and is seeking another designer. Ten firms are competing for the job, including several well known to new urbanists, such as Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, Porphyrios Associates, and Robert Adam Architects, but not Quinlan Terry. The 10 will be pared down to three in October.

### CHARLES'S POPULAR SUPPORT

Though disenchantment with Charles runs strong among architects, elsewhere the prince enjoys support. Georgine Thorburn, chairman of a citizens' organization known as Chelsea Barracks Action Group, said thousands of people had demonstrated "unstinting opposition" to the Rogers plan. Their opposition, rather than the prince's intervention, was the main reason the project was abandoned, she said.

*The Guardian* said Charles uses employees of the foundation to "regularly scrutinise plans by major architects working on some of Britain's biggest building projects."

The central question is whether the prince has overstepped any legal bounds, through what *The Guardian* described as his "close involvement in the management of the foundation."

Hank Dittmar, an American who is the foundation's chief executive — he previously led Reconnecting America and chaired the board of the Congress for New Urbanism — denies there has been any breach of the charity law. The foundation "is an independent charity," Dittmar was quoted as saying by *The Guardian*. "We value the Prince of Wales's

presidency of the organization and his vision, but we take our own decisions."

The foundation has four core activity areas: education (seminars and workshops that teach place-making skills); projects and practice (developments in partnership with the private sector and public agencies); strategic initiatives with major policy partners; and "design theory and networks" (developing and disseminating examples of using innovation and tested tools to build successful communities). Across the United Kingdom and the world, the foundation has 25 projects under way. ♦

## Affordable

FROM PAGE 7

the old Glen Rock Hotel into office and community space; and renovation of a second historic building for occupancy by an arts organization.

Nonprofit builders "do a wonderful job of infill and mixed-use," Daniel says. Private developers have also added new housing through projects like Lexington Station, a downtown project consisting of three buildings with 66 condo units, 25,000 square feet of commercial space, underground parking, and outdoor plazas. Designed by Glazer Architecture, Lexington Station is the first modular, multi-story, multi-family construction in the Asheville area.

Shannon Tuch, the city's assistant director of planning and development, notes that Lexington Station is wrapped by streets on three sides, and offers a pleasing mix of shops and offices on the ground floor, with three to four stories of living quarters above.

In working on Asheville's recently adopted master plan, Dixon and Ben Carlson of Goody Clancy encouraged the city to use form-based zoning with specific design guidelines that regulate height, massing, and materials. They recommended using mechanisms through which the value of a development can help pay for affordable housing, streetscape improvements, and other benefits. They also recommended adopting a three-tier development approval process, in which the City Council reviews only the largest projects. This has the potential to remove some of the obstacles from the path of developers. ♦