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## Cargill's departure presents opportunity

Inside Bay Area

CARGILL SALT announced last week that it will close its Redwood City plant after nearly 30 years of operation to concentrate on its high-end salt production facility in Newark. That is a business decision.

That Cargill Salt has gone into partnership with real estate developer DMB Associates Inc. of Arizona to decide what to do with the 1,433 acres of bayfront property is no doubt a good business decision.

That together Cargill and DMB Associates have mailed letters to every Redwood City household inviting residents to provide input on what should be done with the property is good citizenship.

Truth be told, though, it's also good business.

Although it will phase out its Redwood City operation during the next few years, Cargill will continue to be a company operating on San Francisco Bay. So it's just good business to want to make sure that the bayfront property you're leaving — and the Bay itself — are left in good shape.

The 1,433 acres Cargill leaves behind is prime real estate. Developers would line up for a chance to build residential, commercial and recreational facilities on the property.

But Cargill and DMB have taken the first step in that effort. By soliciting residents' comments and suggestions, it appears that Cargill and DMB want to do the right thing. From here, though, it looks as if they're counting on development advocates among Redwood City's residents outmanaging and outvoicing the environmentalists among them.

Three years ago, Cargill sold 16,500 acres, an area the size of Manhattan, to the federal and state governments in what was then known as the largest wetlands restoration project ever. But as part of that deal, Cargill's offer to sell the 1,433 acres to Redwood City was rejected because of the cost.

Redwood City has zoned the property as a tidal plain which prohibits commercial or residential development. The city's planners want to keep the area zoned as is and concentrate future housing growth downtown, but with the city in the process of updating its general plan, there will be pressure to rezone it and allow development of housing units, and retail and other commercial units.

A year remains before the City Council is scheduled to vote on general plan revisions, and, in that time, Cargill and DMB are gambling that the pro-development people will turn out in force. Thus, armed with such "community backing," Cargill/DMB would be able to ask the City Council to rezone those 1,433 acres because it follows "the will of the people."

And, were that the case, the council would be free to do so.

But we like our Bay the way it is.

Already there's too much bayfront development. Most of it is among the areas most at risk of liquefaction during a major earthquake.

Like-minded residents should make their voices heard in this upcoming debate.