

Public to decide fate of Cargill

By Dana Yates

It could become restored wetlands or it could be developed — the future of Cargill's 1,433-acre saltworks site in Redwood City is in the hands of residents.

The company announced yesterday plans to close its 100-year-old Redwood City facility within three years. It will start an early community input process to learn what the community wants to replace it. A letter to all Redwood City households this week is informing them of the impending wind down and asking for their suggestions on the future use of the site.

The move to get early public input could protect it from facing a referendum later, much like the one that killed the Marina Shores project in 2004.

The 1,433-acre site is situated off Seaport Boulevard and encompasses a large amount of wetlands. The property is currently zoned for minimal development and any large plans will be subject to a zoning change and council review. Redwood City Mayor Barbara Pierce isn't weighing in on what she wants to see there, but said she's happy to see the public process beginning early.

"In these days of referendums it's smarter to know what the community wants from the beginning," Pierce said.

In 2004, the community formed a grassroots movement to oppose the 46-acre development at Marina Shores. The project was approved by the City Council and would have created 1,930 condominiums, a small shopping center, a marina and two hotels on 46 acres east of Highway 101 and adjacent to the Cargill property. A small group of residents collected enough signatures for a referendum and voters overturned the council's decision on the November ballot.

Glenborough-Pauls, the owner of the Marina Shores property, still has the option to develop.

Meanwhile, residents are not relenting. They are watching the Cargill property with a close eye and have high hopes the property will be returned to wetlands, said Ralph Nobles, a key figure in the 2004 referendum.

Nobles said Cargill floated several ideas in the past, including a development comparable to Foster City.

Cargill insists it does not have any preconceived plans for the property and is sincere about its desire to hear public input.

"It's a clean slate, there are no plans," said John Bruno of DMB Associates, the firm hired to facilitate the public input process. "I believe very passionately as you look at a property of this size it is the way to earn the buy-in from the community."

Cargill will hold public meetings and open houses in the coming months, Bruno said.

Last year, Cargill struck a landmark deal with government agencies allowing thousands of acres of tidal wetlands to be restored. The project is the nation's largest shoreline restoration project to date. Cargill agreed to sell its excess ponds to the government for \$100 million in a deal brokered by U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif. A combination of \$25 million from the state, \$32 million from state water and park bonds, \$8 million in federal funds and \$35 million from several well-known philanthropic foundations will pay for the 16,500 acres of land.



Ben Warden/Daily Journal

The future of 1,433 acres of Cargill salt ponds will soon undergo a massive public planning process that could result in new development on the Redwood City Bayshore.

The deal did not include the Redwood City property because Cargill reportedly set the price too high.

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