

Concord Naval Weapons Station planning shifts focus to environmental, labor concerns

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Contra Costa Times

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CONCORD — At February's public hearings on the Concord Naval Weapons Station, residents and activist groups lined up at the microphone to plead their cases: Support local-hire policies. Mandate environmental building standards. Require more affordable housing.

Often, they were unsatisfied with the council's response: Not now. We will deal with that later.

Later starts now. On Tuesday, the City Council unveiled a list of topics it wants to study and revisit.

At the meeting, a handful of those same residents, activists and union leaders praised the council.

"I basically wanted to thank you for listening to the

community," said John Chapman of the Greenbelt Alliance. "A framework is just a framework, but it's a great start."

On Feb. 23, the city approved a reuse plan for the shuttered base that includes 12,272 housing units, 28,800 residents, 26,530 jobs and a park bigger than Tilden Regional Park on the 5,028-acre site.

That plan lays out the rough blueprint for what will be built where. It includes the legally mandated review of the environmental effects of the plan.

But on the advice of its staff, the council decided not to include specific labor and environmental policies that could be handled later.

Tuesday's council resolution specifies which of those policies it will look at, including rules that would require hiring local construction workers, paying them a living wage and meeting environmental construction standards.

The city also will look at extra ways to assuage noise and traffic concerns of neighbors on West Street, Denkinger Road and near the North Concord BART station.

In addition, the city will look at whether the those who will work at the remade base will be able to afford to live there.

The additional studies will be done as the city codifies the plan into the city's general plan, which is what will give it the force of law.

"I look forward to an intelligent discussion of some of these issues, and I think we'll all be educated, frankly," Councilman Mark Peterson said. "I think we all have preconceived ideas about different things

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"... and I think we'll all probably be surprised about some of the things we learn."

Councilman Bill Shinn, an ardent supporter of more stringent affordable housing rules, took the chance to rib Peterson, who has been more skeptical of them.

"I look forward to Mr. Peterson's education in voting for affordable housing," Shinn said with a grin. Laughter filled the chamber.

Also on Tuesday, the council extended the contract of a consultant who is studying whether the weapons station should be added to the city's redevelopment agency. The move would impose additional state requirements on development there but give the city a greater share of its property tax revenue.

Mayor Guy Bjerke summed it up: "We're not done. There's still work to be done."

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