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4. **MILITARY LANDS: New public uses offered for Calif. toxic shipyard**

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

Nearly 10 years after the adoption of a redevelopment plan for the Hunters Point Navy Shipyard on San Francisco Bay, a community-based design group is pressing for major expansion of a proposed 60-acre waterfront park to accommodate more varied public uses.

ARC Ecology, in cooperation with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and a number of community organizations, this month released four alternative visions for a Shipyard Waterfront Park. The park would be located along the southwest section of the 500-acre site of the historic naval shipyard that is being turned over to the city after removal of toxic contaminants.

Three of the alternatives provide more than the simple open-space and wetlands area proposed by the original plan developed by the city. According to ARC Ecology executive director Saul Bloom, the Bayview-Hunters Point community supports a much wider mix of public uses -- everything from basketball courts and picnic areas to a cultural center featuring a museum and outdoor amphitheater.



At the former naval shipyard at Hunters Point, cleanup efforts this year involved excavating 25,000 cubic yards of pipes and soil that had to be scanned for radiological residues. Photo by Arthur O'Donnell.

The question posed by ARC Ecology is, after the Navy completes its cleanup, what kind of public space best serves the community?

The shipyard area, which had been purchased by the government in 1939, was used for shipbuilding and as a repair station but also housed a radiological research facility. It was largely decommissioned in 1974 and leased to a private contractor who subleased former barracks and administrative facilities to local artists. Over the years, the Hunters Point site has grown to house more than 300 studios for painters, sculptors and other artists. It is considered the nation's largest fine arts community and each year hosts an "Open Studio" event that draws thousands of San Francisco residents to view and purchase art directly from the artists.

Economic justice

Extending that model of public access and alternative uses for the former military lands is what guides much of

the Hunters Point redevelopment effort. The surrounding community, currently among San Francisco's most economically distressed, sees restoration of the shipyard as an "environmental justice" issue. The largely African-American population of Bayview-Hunters Point had depended on the shipyard for employment from the 1940s until base closure, and the neighborhood bears a disproportionate share of San Francisco's environmental and health problems.

The shipyard was designated a U.S. EPA Superfund site in 1989, and a year later voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot proposition calling for a thorough environmental cleanup.

Under the Navy's closure plan, the former base has been broken into five major parcels for phased cleanup. Parcel A, where the artists' studios are located, needed little work. That section was formally turned over to the city last year. Lennar/BVHP is currently developing a portion of the property for as many as 1,400 residential units.

Keith Foreman, environmental coordinator for the Navy's Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) program on the West Coast, is overseeing the cleanup effort at Hunters Point. Though part of the Department of Defense's 1991 BRAC priority list, several years were spent on decommissioning activities and feasibility studies. "The cleanup started in earnest in 1994," Foreman told *Land*

Letter.

The current timetable for environmental rehabilitation calls for three other parcels, B, C and D, to be completed in the 2010-2012 timeframe. B and D are the next in line for transfer to the city, Foreman said. Mayor Gavin Newsom has proposed that these parcels serve as the site for a new "green technology" industrial zone, with renewable energy installations owned and operated by the city.

Less certain is how long it will take to complete Parcel E, the section being considered for a waterfront park. This section is also among the most heavily polluted, Foreman said, with the presence of PCBs, solvents, a radium dial disposal field and a metal slag area with residue from the ship repair activities.

BRAC remediation program manager Pete Brooks said, "It will probably go on for another 10 years."

Over the past year, the Navy has spent about \$70 million on cleanup, said Brooks, largely because of removal of five miles of sewer pipes throughout the base that had to be tested for radiological contamination. About 39-linear feet of pipe was found to be contaminated with cesium or radium, he said. Other work involves removing and detoxifying basin sediments of industrial solvents.

Because of its location, however, Parcel E is considered by ARC Ecology to offer the most potential for a much larger southern Bay Shore park and provide a new link among several recently redeveloped shoreline parks, including the 400-mile Bay Trail.

The city's plan called for less than total removal of toxics and "recapping" contaminated soils to allow for open space, including restoration of Yosemite Slough -- what used to be a wetland bird habitat that has been filled in and is heavily contaminated from sewer runoff. It breaks Parcel E into two portions, a 20-acre wetland for bird habitat and a 40-acre strip of open space and a recreational trail.

However, ARC Ecology's proposal considers the 60-acre shore-edge park plan "too narrow to support continuous habitat or very many activities desired by the community." It would be difficult to access with no parking facilities; proposed industrial operations along its border would reduce scenic beauty and desirability, and its trails dead end at the industrial zone.

Instead, ARC Ecology offered three other alternatives, for 75 acres, 100 acres, or the largest 167-acre complex, which it says are preferred by local residents via surveys, interviews and community workshops that the park project group has conducted over several years.



Barracks and administration facilities at Hunters Point now house the working studios of more than 300 visual artists. Here, residents visit during the annual Open Studio weekend in October. Photo by Arthur O'Donnell.

According to the report, "Hunters Point residents have expressed desires that could be fulfilled by a waterfront park, defined here as greater than 100 acres, that integrates recreation, habitat and economic development functions." The potential park was likened to San Francisco's northern waterfront, including the Marina Green and Aquatic Park, "where beaches, piers, forested areas, green space, lawns and playing fields are interspersed with art, tourism, retail, restaurants, small businesses, former warehouses converted into office space and nearby housing."

ARC Ecology's Bloom said there is another factor that could spur a broader vision for the Hunters Point shoreline: San Francisco's desire to host the 2016 Summer Olympics (it is one of three U.S. cities being considered for nomination by the Olympics siting committee). The shipyard site is just across an inlet from the football stadium where any Olympics activities would center.

Bloom disputed some estimates that it will take as long as 22 years for complete cleanup of Parcel E. "San Francisco has an economic need, if it's going to compete for the Olympics, this has to be done by 2014." He also said the Navy is motivated to complete property conveyance by 2014, or else it will face higher costs.

He foresees a draft plan for remedial actions to be formulated by 2008 for adoption 18-months later. "It's moving very rapidly," he said.

As for the cost of the project, ARC Ecology will be presenting an economic analysis later this month that will challenge some of the city's cost assumptions, said Bloom. One consulting firm has estimated complete cleanup would be prohibitively expensive, Bloom countered that it may cost less than \$200 million. "We've not found any unexploded ordinance on the site and only marginally radiological material has been found," he said.