

# IN THE NEWS

---



## Controversial Richmond housing project heads to city council

EAST BAY TIMES | By ANNIE SCIACCA November 23, 2020

RICHMOND — The City Council will face a decision soon on whether to allow a controversial plan to build a mixed-used project atop a contaminated site.

The city's Planning Commission unanimously agreed last week to recommend the council approve the project's needed permits, development agreement and environmental mitigation measures.

The site near the bay, once owned by the Zeneca (now AstraZeneca) pharmaceutical company, lies east of Marina Bay and west of Interstate 580 in southeastern Richmond. The developer, Shopoff Realty Investments, wants to construct 2,000 to 4,000 housing units and up to 50,000 square feet of retail space.

The proposed development — called the Campus Bay Project in city documents — and cleanup plans for the site have long been a source of controversy. Formerly home to Zeneca and before that, to the Stauffer Chemical Company, the site was a dumping ground for toxic materials for decades, until Zeneca halted that practice in 1997 and began cleaning up the site in 2000.

The issue is likely to come before the City Council in December. But activists and some residents are urging the city to slow down and wait to make any decisions on the project until the newly elected councilmembers take their seats in January.

Last year, the City Council voted 5-2 to endorse a cleanup method for the site that includes removing some contaminated soil, treating the groundwater and pouring concrete over the contaminated areas. While that plan was approved by the Department of Toxic Substances Control last year, activists and some residents say that method doesn't go far enough. They want a more thorough removal of the soil, which the council had recommended before endorsing the capping method.

The Department of Toxic Substances Control, in a statement issued last year about its decision to approve the capping method, said the more complete soil excavation method would take 10 years and require an estimated 64,370 truck trips to get rid of the material, which would "create harmful impacts to the community, including air pollution, dangerous traffic and increased dust." The capping method, alternatively, requires about two years and 1,050 truck trips.

Still, proponents of the more thorough soil excavation cleanup method say it's the safer option for those who will be living on and around the site. They are calling on the city to develop a new environmental impact report, and to consider, besides the contaminated soil, the threat of sea-level rise (the project site sits near the San Francisco Bay Trail, along the water), more thoroughly.

In an earlier letter to the Planning Commission, Sierra Club chair and attorney Norman La Force expressed opposition to the project on behalf of the Richmond Southeast Shoreline Area Community Advisory Group, citing analysis from a scientist in the group who says that seawater could enter the soil through liquefaction in an earthquake or because of sea-level rise. The salts and oxygen in the bay water could result in contaminated toxic arsenic, mercury and lead being released from contaminated cinders at the site, according to the analysis.

Others have expressed support for the project, including local construction union members and the president of the police union, who urged the commission to approve the project that would inject needed units into the city's housing stock and fix up a toxic site that has sat vacant for years.

The developer has agreed to commit millions of dollars in community benefits that include money for Richmond schools and community programs, and improvements to a local fire station and community center. It also has agreed to build a grocery store in the first phase of the project, and to use union labor.