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Readers Forum: World-class plan for weapons station land

art bonwell, chuck carpenter, kathy gleason and roberto pena | From the community

By Art Bonwell, Chuck Carpenter, Kathy Gleason and Roberto Pena

Guest commentary

Article Launched: 07/25/2008 11:03:59 PM PDT

THE FUTURE OF Concord is being decided now. A draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been released for the reuse of the Concord Naval Weapons Station (CNWS), hearings are under way, the Navy is demanding the process be expedited, and adoption of a final reuse plan is just around the corner. At one-third the size of present-day Concord, what happens to the CNWS will shape our city for generations to come.

Everyone agrees that the plan for the CNWS should be "world class" and "sustainable." But unless our community comes together to give these ideas life and insist that the plan reflect our values, they will simply be meaningless words.

We are members of the Community Coalition for a Sustainable Concord, with more than a dozen housing, faith, environmental and labor organizations representing thousands of members in Concord and including the 1,100-family CNWS Neighborhood Alliance. The platform developed by the CCSC reflects our values and provides a road map for transforming the CNWS into a world-class project.

We define a world-class project as one that looks to the future rather than replicating the mistakes of the past. To us, sustainability means preserving open space for our grandchildren, protecting the health of our environment and neighbors, and providing both job opportunities and affordable housing that maintains Concord as a diverse and vibrant community.

The city of Concord is debating the

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that our community values must win.

We need to maintain the hills and open space of the CNWS for future generations. Right now, the whole base is public land — our land. Allowing development east of the creek or south of Bailey Road takes us down a path of private use from which we can never return. Once the land is subdivided and developed, it severely limits the ability of the public to use and enjoy it for years to come

We need the CNWS to include housing for all segments of Concord. Already, many of our neighbors spend more than a third of their income on housing, forcing them to choose between the mortgage or rent and other vital services such as health care and saving for the future. If we do not plan well, Concord will become unaffordable to our children, as well as for our seniors, our teachers, and our police officers and firefighters who keep us safe.

We need CNWS development that contributes to the health of our planet and the people who occupy it. We must demand full toxic chemical cleanup of the site and insist on the highest green building standards. We also must demand the creation of housing, jobs and services near transit to give people alternatives to automobiles and make walking and biking a real option so as to avoid sprawl and the traffic nightmare that would surely ensue. In addition, implementing local hiring, apprenticeship programs and living wage standards will help train and keep Concord workers in middle-class careers. Ensuring that people can afford to both live and work in Concord will reduce the traffic congestion and pollution that comes when people must commute to work for hours down Interstate 680 or through the Caldecott Tunnel.

These forward-looking goals also make economic sense for our city. While housing prices in car-dependent suburbs fall, neighborhoods that put people closer to services, recreation, and work remain resilient. Lenders are looking to invest in the types of vibrant, diverse, and walkable neighborhoods that will be the wave of the future. With proper planning on the CNWS site, Concord can and will attract this investment.

We urge you to attend the Reuse Community Workshop on "Balancing the Alternatives" on Aug. 2 at 9 a.m. at the Concord Senior Center and to submit written comments on the draft EIR to the city by Aug. 8 advocating for a CNWS development plan that will serve our city for the next century. Tell the city that you want vital open space preserved for conservation and recreation; that you support clustering development of housing, jobs and retail near public transit; and that you expect the city to use this public land to benefit you and your children for the next 100 years, not some developer's short-sighted bottom line nor the Navy's hurried time line at the expense of the public process.

Future generations in Concord are depending on us. We must not let them down.

Bonwell is co-founder of Save Mount Diablo and a Concord resident; Carpenter is a member of Carpenters Local Union 152 and a Concord resident; Gleason is a member of the Concord Naval Weapons Station Neighborhood Alliance and a Concord resident; and Pena is a community organizer with Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization and is also a

Concord resident. For more information on the Community Coalition for a Sustainable Concord, go to www.EBHO.org/CCSC.

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