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NEWS

Secret offer to kill Saltworks plan

Andy Cohen proposed offering housing on El Camino Real to



COHEN

Redwood City if it would reject a proposed 8,000- to 12,000-home development proposed for the Cargill salt ponds east of Highway 101, e-mails

released yesterday show.

The salt ponds project is moving through the approval process in Redwood City, but in a surprising move last fall, Menlo Park's City Council passed a resolution urging Redwood City to reject the project.

The developer, Redwood City Industrial Saltworks, filed a public records request with the city of Menlo Park to obtain all e-mails surrounding the resolution and the developer turned the e-mails over to the media yesterday.

Many conversations

The e-mails show many unguarded conversations between Menlo Park officials, residents

In uncovered e-mails, councilman in Menlo offers housing swap instead

and the political director of Save the Bay, Stephen Knight. Save the Bay is fighting the salt works project.

In a June 9 e-mail, Cohen wrote to Knight: "...talked about a regional approach to housing cooperating with Redwood City to provide some higher density in our El Camino Real visioning process along El Camino in exchange for Cargill project going away - you'd have to work this out in greater detail with (former Menlo Park council member) Paul (Collacchi), but it's consistent with my earlier stand - enjoyed our lunch - look forward to working with you."

Seal the deal

On July 11, Cohen explained the proposed deal in more detail, telling fellow council member Kelly Fergusson in an e-mail, "I would be willing to give R.C.

some credit for housing we create to seal the deal."

All of the cities on the Peninsula are under pressure by the Association of Bay Area Governments, or ABAG, to construct additional low-income housing.

The e-mails outraged Saltworks officials.

"We've been working for three years in Redwood City and doing so very openly. When you see how Save the Bay is trying to work backroom deals with municipalities who don't have jurisdiction, you really wonder what their agenda is," said Saltworks spokesman Pete Hillan. "You really see how Save the Bay is trying to corrupt the process."

"I was just looking for a way to help everybody without having to give up some marshland," Cohen told the Post.

But, Cohen added, "I don't have the power to do that."

The e-mails also revealed some unguarded moments of council members. For instance, Fergusson wrote in a July 12 e-mail that she would rather work with Save the Bay's Knight than Brielle Johnck.

"I am worried about engaging with Brielle because of her history of polarizing and erratic behavior," wrote Fergusson.

In an Oct. 16 e-mail, Portola Valley council member Maryann Derwin tells Fergusson that she would be willing to propose a similar anti-Saltworks resolution in her town. "I can propose it to our mayor (Ann Wengert), but I'm almost 100% certain she won't put it on the agenda - she flees from anything controversial. Of the remaining three PV council members, one might be sympathetic," Derwin wrote.