

National City inches toward waterfront progress

By [Allison Sampite-Montecalvo \(/staff/allison-sampite-montecalvo/\)](/staff/allison-sampite-montecalvo/) 10:31 a.m. June 25, 2013

NATIONAL CITY — Plans to further develop National City's waterfront look promising, National City Port Commissioner Robert "Dukie" Valderrama told City Council members at their June 18 meeting.

Valderrama updated council members on the details of a Port of San Diego meeting held June 11 regarding plans to negotiate a lease with GB Capital Holdings LLC. It calls for a 20-acre recreational vehicle resort in the city's Marina District, including 165 high-end rental spaces as well as on-site amenities.

Valderrama said he was adamant at the port meeting about moving forward in negotiations with GB Capital.

"I feel very optimistic that we're going to be able to move forward with GB Capital and we'll be able to open up our waterfront to our community," he said.

The port and city have been working to enhance the city's bayfront Marina District by providing increased maritime business and visitor amenities.

In December, port board members directed staff to begin negotiations with GB Capital, which submitted the Pier 32 Gateway Village Resort and Marina proposal in March, but no momentum was made on the project.

The same month, Pasha Automotive Services, which contracts for vehicle and cargo transportation operations at the National City Marine Terminal, asked to expand its infrastructure, including railroad tracks through the 20 acres proposed for the resort.

Within 20 years, Pasha has grown from bringing in 30,000 vehicles a year to 400,000, producing millions in revenue for capital improvement projects in National City and other cities.

It now wants approval to bring in 800,000 vehicles.

Despite the contributions Pasha has made, the port staff, Valderrama and the Environmental Health Coalition are concerned about health risks associated with fumes emitted during the unloading.

"If they're going to keep expanding their business we better find out what impacts they're going to have and I think that's a legitimate concern that we need to be able to address," Valderrama said.

Members of the environmental group sent a letter to the port recommending a truck-staging area, car-stacking structure and job outreach to local communities, among other things, saying before additional land or capacity is allowed, impacts must be analyzed or mitigated.

Carolina Martinez, a policy advocate for the group, said a designated staging area would be a location on the terminal where all trucks would park while waiting for dispatch. Pasha prefers placing the staging area on the city's east side next to hotels on property outside port jurisdiction.

An independent study revealed other locations for future rail development, and an old tank farm site has attracted support.

The health issue also has affected the Barrio Logan community, when a truck staging area was blamed for causing sickness among children in nearby apartment complexes.

Last August, the Dole company's truck staging area was moved from Barrio Logan to National City's west side without council discussion, council members said.

Councilwoman Mona Rios said after the transaction with Dole, communication between the port and city is vital.

Councilman Luis Natividad agreed.

"I want Pasha to know and also any other waterfront business that we're here and that we're open to discuss things," he said. "One of the worst things that happens when you're here as an elected official is when something gets decided without you knowing."

Since then, monthly meetings were scheduled to keep open communication between the port's CEO Wayne Darbeau and National City Manager Leslie Deese.

Commissioners asked the port staff to bring back a lease option for GB Capital in July. The lease and the Pasha proposal are expected to be discussed in July.

"This has been a long time in coming to get us to this point and we've still got a lot of battling to do yet," Morrison said.

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