

Environmental Health Coalition

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401 Mile of Cars Way, Suite 310 ♦ National City, CA 91950 ♦ (619) 474-0220 ♦ FAX: (619) 474-1210
ehc@environmentalhealth.org ♦ www.environmentalhealth.org

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Contacts

Laura Hunter, (619) 997-9983

Bayfront Coalition and Allies to Support New Chula Vista Bayfront Master Plan

(Chula Vista) – A coalition of leading environmental and community groups will support the adoption of a new Chula Vista Bayfront Master Plan by the San Diego Board of Port Commissioners and the Chula Vista City Council at a joint hearing today at 1 p.m. at Chula Vista City Hall.

The Proposed Sweetwater Park Compromise Plan allows development of the Bayfront to move forward while protecting the environment and increasing public access to open spaces. The plan secures a land trade that will protect more than 85 acres of the Sweetwater District as park, open space, and habitat enhancement. It removes all residential development from the lands adjacent to the Sweetwater Marsh and South San Diego Bay Refuges — a top priority for the community and environmental groups.

A settlement agreement between the Bayfront Coalition, the Port District and the City of Chula Vista adopted last week and integrated into the plan ensures that significant community benefits, wildlife protection, and green energy practices are now part of the Sweetwater plan.

“This project is a significant improvement over the existing land use plans in effect on the Bayfront,” said Laura Hunter of the Environmental Health Coalition. “This plan is economically feasible, contains significant commitments to community benefits, energy efficient technologies, and protects local National Wildlife Refuges. This is less invasive development that is good for people and the environment.”

Also significant is the Community Benefits Agreement reached between the Bayfront Coalition and project developer, Pacifica Development.

“From the beginning, Pacifica has been very serious about listening to the community,” said Allison Rolfe, project manager for Pacifica. “A major aspect of our commitment was to trade 97 acres of open land in the Sweetwater District for 35 acres of formerly industrial fill land for the purpose of addressing environmental concerns and to protect wildlife in the area.”

As a result of the agreement, Pacifica’s development will be more environmentally friendly and energy efficient. It will achieve LEED certification and proposes to construct buildings that will exceed existing energy efficiency standards by 20 percent, even more than required by the city and the Port. In addition, Pacifica agreed to minimum buffers from industries and freeways for residential construction and to provide significant contributions to two community benefits accounts to be made available for community benefits for Western Chula Vista for protection of natural resources, sustainability, affordable housing and education and culture projects.

“We are lucky to have Pacifica as a developer on the Bayfront,” said Hunter. “Their commitment to the community and the environment is unparalleled.”

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“The Building Trades represent working people and their families who, during this economic downturn, have been hit hard,” said Tom Lemmon of the San Diego County Building and Construction Trades Council. “So we are particularly happy to see the proposed Pacifica hotel project take the next step as we have worked with the developer to ensure that it will be good for workers and the environment.”

The Sweetwater Park plan reduces proposed residential units from a one-time proposal of 3,400 condos to 1,500. It also requires that 50 percent of new energy demand be addressed through improved building operations, additional energy efficiency or renewable energy features. In addition, two public participation committees – one for natural resources and one for design and culture – will ensure that the public continues to have opportunities for meaningful engagement as the projects are developed.

“The project we are supporting today was the result of a multi-year effort by the Bayfront Coalition to secure a supportable plan and to ensure that all commitments related to the Bayfront development were enforceable and funded. We have clearly set a new standard for collaborative land use planning,” said Marco Gonzalez of Coast Law Group, who represented EHC and many Bayfront Coalition members throughout the process.

“It’s been a long and tough process but it will be well worth it when, in 20 years, we have a vibrant Bayfront community where people will live, work, and play and enjoy the sights and sounds of healthy marshlands full of shorebirds, terns and other wildlife,” said Jim Peugh of the San Diego Audubon Society.

Bayfront Coalition member organizations are: Environmental Health Coalition; San Diego Audubon Society; San Diego Coastkeeper; Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation; Surfrider Foundation, San Diego Chapter; Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association; and, EMPOWER San Diego.

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