

Guest Commentary: Federal Glover: Teams working to make recommendations for Northern Waterfront Initiative

By Federal Glover

For the Contra Costa Times

POSTED: 07/22/2014 04:23:32 PM PDT

The Northern Waterfront Initiative is already generating exciting ideas six months since we hosted the historic forum that was held last January in Antioch.

It was the first time all the stakeholders gathered in a single room. Waterfront interests included the cities along the northern waterfront, industry, which included small businesses as well as the large corporations, educators, environmentalists, park and recreation, a short-line railroad, the Army Corps of Engineers and a host of policy makers.

Out of the forum, more than 70 people signed up for eight action area committees in specific subject to help formulate a strategic plan. Those groups are: Land-use, business climate and regulatory environment; Infrastructure investment; Development incentives and financing; Regional branding and marketing; Cluster development and innovation; Business support services; Workforce Development; Quality of life.

Since January, the teams -- made up of public agencies, private or independent business people or corporations, and interested individuals -- have been meeting to pinpoint any possible obstacles, identify allies and research for any sources of financial backing for those various aspects of the waterfront's future. The East Bay Leadership Council leads most of the action teams.

The action teams' goals are to identify the issues and where possible, make policy recommendations. Even though they've already had several meetings, anyone interested in joining any of the teams are welcome to call county staffer Rich Seithel at 925-674-7869 or email him at rich.seithel@dcd.cccounty.us.

Once the teams have their recommendations, they will submit them to a consortium of public and private entities, which is being formed. The consortium will take these action team recommendations and prioritize them before presenting them to the Northern Waterfront work group. The work group consists of staff from the cities along the northern waterfront and the county.

The work group will devise a strategic plan based on the refined recommendations of the action teams. That plan should be completed by the end of the year. The strategic plan will then be presented for approval to the Board of Supervisors and the northshore cities' councils.

On other fronts: All the northern waterfront cities have lent their support for this important initiative. Our representatives in Sacramento and in Washington are behind the planning process and have agreed to do whatever they can in their respective capacities to help this initiative along. Our regional planning agencies, ABAG and MTC, are being kept in the loop and have been supportive. The county's community college district has secured funding for the job training aspect. We continue to seek funding opportunities for our regional planning initiative.

Since the January forum, several private companies have expressed interest in locating their business on the 50-mile long northern waterfront. One such business, Vortex Marine Construction Inc., will be moving to the shoreline east of Antioch. Vortex specializes in large infrastructure construction projects and does business throughout the United States.

The Northern Waterfront encompasses 47 square miles and contains 61 percent of our county's industrial zoned land. It generates \$21.6 billion in annual economic output, or about a third of Contra Costa's Gross Regional Product (GRP).

One of the recommendations that came out of the forum was an emphasis to seek out innovative projects that may lead into new directions in terms of future businesses for the waterfront area. One of these is the experimental farm being planned on 14.8 acres owned by the Contra Costa Central Sanitary District near Highway 4.

CoCo San Sustainable Farm (CoCo Farm) is a project of AgLantis. CoCo Farm is an urban farm will grow produce using sustainable, organic methods in both conventional and hydroponic greenhouse production to provide for salads for schools and fresh produce for the Food Bank at a very low cost with a minimal carbon footprint.

Besides offering hands-on science training and greenhouse management training as well as teaching sustainable agricultural production. In other words, the farm will be an incubator for green jobs. CoCo Farm will partner with other sustainable businesses to showcase their

products and teach aspects of jobs related to these industries. For instance, Ecolobue has offered to donate a machine that produces potable water from the atmosphere.

As an example of the partnerships it envisions, the green house the farm will be using was manufactured in Pittsburg-based AgriTech and the Contra Costa Food Bank will take most of the produce for delivery to people and areas lacking fresh produce.

Although most of the conversation centered on the economic aspect of the waterfront, 60 percent of the land that lies in the target area is zoned open space and is untouchable for development.

As a spinoff of this effort, it is hoped that public access will be improved to those lands, most of it deemed as wetland and environmentally sensitive.

With this initiative, we hope to add 18,000 more jobs by 2035 on top of the 26,000 jobs that are already here because of the commercial and manufacturing activity on the northern waterfront. This is a very long-term project and we shouldn't expect immediate results -- although exciting things are already happening -- but we're in it for the long haul so that our entire region can benefit from improving the Northern Waterfront, one of our county's greatest assets.

Federal Glover represents District V on the county Board of Supervisors.