

Palo Alto officials urge assistance for East Palo Alto

By JAY THORWALDSON

Midpeninsula communities should move beyond the Dumbarton Bridge controversy into deeper issues such as the economic development of East Palo Alto, according to Palo Alto City Councilman John Berwald.

"We talk about regional government a lot," he said "Why don't we talk about our responsibilities as a subregion to those communities which are underfinanced, underplanned, and underdeveloped."

He said that East Palo Alto, right in the heart of the Midpeninsula, is a prime example of an under-resourced community that is struggling to pull itself up, but which is facing almost impossible odds without outside help.

"If there was only some way we might set up some sort of private-public partnership organization to work on the physical development of that area," he said.

Berwald said that his one-time strong opposition to a new Dumbarton Bridge has become an acceptance, although he is "still not all that in favor" of it. He said the traffic impact of a new bridge could be mitigated by making two of the four-lanes into exclusive bus transit lanes during the peak commute hours.

He said he plans to formally present both the East Palo Alto development idea — when he thinks it through more — and the bus-lane proposal to the Palo Alto City Council within the next three or four weeks.

Berwald indicated that he has been concerned during the inter-community debates and discussions on the bridge issue (Palo Alto and Atherton oppose it; Menlo Park and East Palo Alto favor it) that when it came to East Palo Alto and its needs "we ought to listen; I don't think we have."

He said he would like to see a meeting of the entire Palo Alto City Council and the East Palo Alto Municipal Council. For the meeting, the bridge issue should be set aside and "I'd like to communicate in a realistic way" about how the cities can work together on the broader issues.

"Dumbarton is not the big issue in East Palo Alto's support for the new bridge, Berwald said. "The big issue is the development of East Palo Alto." "They're trying, and they can't do it by themselves. I think it's time to say we can't have a pocket of poverty in the middle of the Midpeninsula."

Berwald said he knows East Palo Alto officials

"don't want handouts," but that East Palo Alto's problems ought to be considered as subregional in nature, because they are.

"East Palo Alto has enough social and employment problems that they need whatever encouragement and aid from the surrounding cities that they can get," he said. The problems include employment, tax base, flood control, and others. "They feel the bridge will help them," he said.

Mayor Byron Sher of Palo Alto said that the "general idea is something we all might respond positively to, but I'd like to see some specifics from Berwald or anyone else. Over the years a lot of us have been sympathetic to East Palo Alto's need for a revenue base."

Henry Anthony, chairman of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council, said of Berwald's suggestions that "it has been my contention all along that this is the way we should be going."

"When each of the communities realizes its responsibility to the others, only then will we be able to realize a successful community relationship," Anthony said.

Anthony said a large part of East Palo Alto's present lack of industrial tax base is that Palo Alto bought the 96-acre Faber Tract — now marsh — and Menlo Park annexed the Kavanaugh In-

dustrial Park area and "they've even taken away our bay front."

"But I'd like to keep on the positive point and talk about what's possible for

the future. Our kids go over to Palo Alto and cause problems for the police

department. Our people go over and spend their dollars in Palo Alto stores. We've

got work to do and I'm ready to get started as soon as possible," Anthony said.

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