

East Palo Alto dream Key week for Cooley Landing Harbor plan

By TOM GILSENAN

DREAMS of a new Bay harbor in East Palo Alto are struggling to stay alive this week. Faced with a Friday deadline, supporters of the Cooley Landing project have been pressing hard the past few days to keep a flicker of hope from going out.

Behind the project is Jay Thorwaldson, a long time Palo Altan and former Palo Alto Times reporter who resigned shortly after the paper was purchased by the Chicago Tribune. He had run across the harbor idea many times during more than a decade of covering local politics. "I decided to take four months to see if something could be done," Thorwaldson said Saturday while walking through the Bay front marsh. He says there's nothing in it for him financially -- it's just a dream which fascinated him -- a possibility too good to not try and make come true.

Thorwaldson put down \$3,000 of his own money to obtain an option on two key parcels for a harbor. They are at the end of Bay Road in East Palo Alto. Owned by West Bay Properties, the two are largely watery marsh, but contain enough dry land to make the idea of a revitalized harbor seem possible.

(In earlier times, before the Palo Alto yacht harbor was built, Cooley landing was the major harbor for Palo Alto and nearby communities. Fifty years ago, East Palo Alto was strawberry fields and chicken ranches. Produce and poultry were shipped from this harbor).

SINCE GETTING the option, Thorwaldson has been trying to drum up support for the Cooley Harbor and a marina he envisions there. His enthusiasm is infectious and he has managed to interest a number of landowners along the Bay, including Leslie Salt, as well as rekindle the hopes for a marina of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council.

As sketched to a number of different audiences, the harbor would be built at the very end of Bay Road. A deep water channel -- something the Palo Alto Harbor does not have naturally -- would make boating more attractive from this spot. One study suggests a big share of Palo Alto's harbor business would switch to Cooley Landing if a harbor were there. (Continued dredging of the Palo Alto Harbor, essential to keep it open, now seems extremely unlikely unless the political balance of the city council were to change dramatically. Only one more dredging is planned.)

HOW TO FINANCE construction and continued

operation of a harbor? There isn't much prospect that conventional harbor construction could be financed, Thorwaldson admits. But he has a sackful of ideas to cut costs ("We could drain out one area and then do construction on dry land.... we could use work release programs...this could provide on-the-job training.")

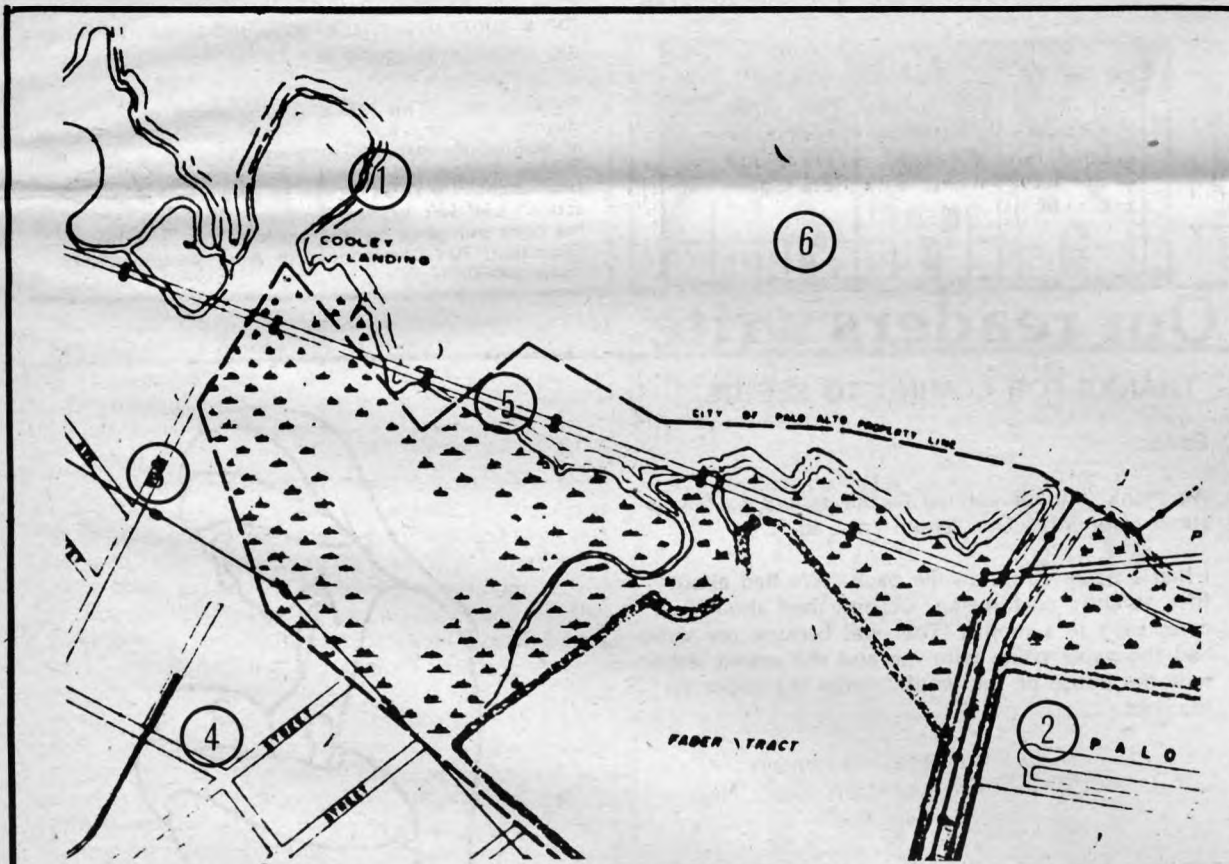
Operation of the harbor at a break-even level could be by a government or non-profit agency. The East Palo Alto Municipal Council would like to control the harbor and marina, a prospect which would be much easier if the community were incorporated as a city.

But as the weeks have passed, it appeared the whole harbor project might be stalled once again in the face of two big obstacles. One problem is the interest rate for borrowing money. Another is trying to purchase a thin strip of land between the two parcels on which Thorwaldson has an option. Owned by Carl Schoof, the narrow piece juts out furthest into the Bay -- perfect for a harbor. But Schoof is reportedly asking \$825,000 for his 200 foot wide parcel.

IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, a new plan has emerged to keep the dream of a new harbor alive past the June 7 deadline. It calls for the Midpeninsula Open Space District to acquire the two West Bay parcels (at a price of \$120,000) by this Friday's deadline.

Supporters of the harbor project say this would:

1) Give East Palo Alto its first access to the Bay (though adjacent to the Bay, no part of East Palo Alto reaches the Bay. Access is shut off, primarily by Palo Alto and Menlo Park which have annexed Baylands around East Palo Alto).



KEY TO BAYLANDS MAP

1. Cooley Landing, site of the proposed harbor and marina.
2. Palo Alto Airport.
3. Bay Road, entrance to the proposed harbor site.
4. East Palo Alto neighborhoods back right up to the Baylands.
5. PG&E power lines cross the Baylands.
6. San Francisco Bay

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