

An Open Letter to the Community On Measure U

from California Native Plant Society

The most critical East Bay election this year is Richmond's city race where voters will decide whom to elect for city council and mayor and whether to support Measure U, the Richmond Citizen's Advisory vote to approve a casino at Point Molate. There are few local races that will have broader implications for the future of Richmond, our East Bay shoreline and the greater bayside environment.

And yet, the silence on Measure U from major Bay Area environmental organizations is deafening. No spirited debate among the leading environmental organizations, no call to action to vote down the casino except from the East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. These are strange times indeed. What cast such a pall over a critically important public discussion and the public service that it provides citizens?

The unhappy truth behind this situation is the application of a powerful weapon—the threat of a poison pill. Since we first learned of the proposed settlement between Upstream Development and Citizens for Eastshore State Park and SPRAWLDEF more than a year ago, we have been told that the agreement and its benefits will dissolve if any major environmental organization contests the Environmental Impact Report. Our unequivocal response has been that we would not agree to give up our legal rights. Since we have never seen the settlement agreement, we cannot know whether the poison pill is real or merely a threat. But the developer promise of big money that could go away if somebody else ruins the deal (big carrot, bigger stick) has had a chilling impact on public discourse. Who wants to be perceived as the spoiler?

From our perspective, it's one thing to sue and negotiate your own settlement, and to that extent we believe that the negotiators operated in good faith. It is quite another to agree to a condition that would attempt to impose a private settlement upon an entire community without public debate, particularly when the terms include approving a publicly unpopular mega-development. Apparently the cynical ploy worked. Visit the website of nearly any major Bay Area environmental organization or read their ballot recommendations and you won't find mention of Richmond's Measure U. In some cases you'll find statements of support for the settlement agreement from different organizations with sentences composed of the exact same text. Environmental groups prejudged the outcome, and rather than waiting to hear the will of the Richmond voters, these organizations have gotten out front with a pro-casino message.

We believe that it is in the public interest to understand what effect the poison pill claim has on the public process. It brings us no great pleasure to notice how powerfully it silenced an entire community whose reputation is built on transparency. And, yes, we remain adamantly opposed to the casino and to anything other than sustainable development at Point Molate. The irony is that the prospects have never been better for defeating the casino and clearing the path for sound planning to protect Point Molate and the San Pablo Peninsula. Polls show Measure U going down to defeat.

Perhaps the best news of all is that strong vibrant grassroots groups such as the Citizens for a Sustainable Point Molate and the Richmond Progressive Alliance have

organized out of the understanding that they cannot look to the environmental community to oppose the casino, and they have found the resolve to carry the fight forward on their own terms. We plan to give them all the support we can. **We urge Richmond residents to vote No on Measure U.** Our non-profit status bars us from endorsing candidates, but we urge those who oppose the casino to learn which candidates share their views and get out and vote. The Richmond Progressive Alliance (www.richmondprogressivealliance.net/) has election signs and materials. Contact them at their office at 317 11th Street, Richmond, 510-412-2260.

Sincerely,

Delia Taylor, President

Laura Baker, Conservation Committee Chair, (510) 684 - 4572

Lech Naumovich, Conservation Analyst, (510) 734 – 0335

East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society

California Native Plant Society

East Bay Chapter

510.734.0335

www.ebcnps.org

EBCNPS

PO Box 5597

Berkeley, CA 94705

"dedicated to the conservation of native flora"