

March 12, 2012

Mayor and City Council
P.O. Box 391
1017 Middlefield Road
Redwood City, CA 94064



Re: Ensuring an Independent and Credible CEQA Process
for the Proposed Saltworks Project

Honorable Mayor Aguirre and City Council Members:

Redwood City Neighbors United (RCNU) is writing to request changes in the way the City is conducting its environmental impact analysis for the proposed Saltworks Project submitted by Cargill's developer, DMB.

Over the past 18 months, the City Council and Staff have made significant strides to include Redwood City residents in the environmental review process. Such efforts as the focused scoping workshops, the extended initial scoping comment period, and posting of project-related documents on the City's website are all to be commended. They demonstrate the City's commitment to an inclusive public process.

Beyond public outreach, the fair and transparent process that you have promised the community also requires that no interested party be afforded the opportunity to influence the content and conclusions of the environmental analysis behind closed doors. Furthermore, consultants and other experts retained to conduct technical analyses and provide expert opinions should not be placed in a position where they might feel pressured to favor one report outcome over another.

We are therefore surprised and disappointed to learn from City planning documents that the City is permitting the developer to select, hire, and directly oversee consultants performing studies for all but two sections of the Saltworks Environmental Impact Report (EIR). At the very least, this practice creates the appearance of a conflict of interest and will likely result in evaluations perceived by the public as biased. At worst, this situation affords the opportunity for the developer to privately control the content of reports that form the primary backbone for the EIR, before the developer then submits them to the City for review. Even though these reports are peer-reviewed by the City, peer reviews can be perfunctory, and are limited to an evaluation of the data and conclusions the developer's consultant has elected to include; they do not amount to "parallel" studies.

The path the City is currently following creates a direct business relationship between the consultants and the developer. Consultants work for their clients and are often hired to advance their clients' interests. The developer has a clear financial interest to see an EIR that characterizes potential environmental impacts in a manner that limits their effects – not only would this make it easier for the project to be approved, but it could save the developer countless dollars in mitigation costs. It is unconscionable in our view to permit this practice to continue, especially in light of the City's expressed commitment to a fair and open process, and the degree of public controversy

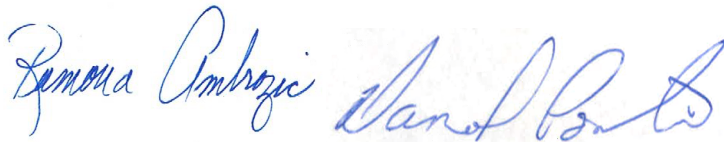
surrounding the Saltworks Project. The client for the EIR is the City of Redwood City, and the City bears ultimate responsibility for the content of the report, not the developer.

We urge you to change this practice and require that the City selects, hires, and directly oversees all of the consultants contributing to the EIR, and not allow the developer to intervene in that process. Many cities on the Peninsula, including Santa Clara, San Mateo, San Francisco and others, have put procedures in place to avoid the perception of bias in their EIRs. Although costs are borne by the developer, the consultants work for these cities as neutral parties, generating studies and reports that can truly be viewed as independent and fair because the consultants interact with and report directly to the city, not the developer. We are only asking that Redwood City align its practices with the best practices found in these communities.

With work on the Saltworks Project EIR currently suspended, now is an ideal time to change your practice and put the environmental analysis on the right track. The City has everything to gain and nothing to lose with this approach. It will help ensure the community's confidence in a truly independent and credible EIR that the City and other agencies can rely on to make an informed decision.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ramona Ambrozic and Dan Ponti, Co-Chairs
Redwood City Neighbors United

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