

Supes Seek Info On Possibilities For Local-Hire Capability

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Saying it's vital for the local economy, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors has asked for research into whether they can require local labor to be used on larger construction projects that come before the board.

But to do that will require addressing what Supervisor John Gioia called a "diminishing supply of trained, skilled construction crews" in the East Bay.

The issue was raised during discussion Tuesday of the 284-unit Del Hombre Apartments project near the Pleasant Hill-Contra Costa Centre BART station. It came to the supervisors after two citizen groups that oppose the project appealed the county Planning Commission's recent approval.

Nirit Lotan, an attorney for one of those groups, Contra Costa Citizens for Responsible Development, told the Board of Supervisors Tuesday that ensuring the hiring of local construction workers would help balance out unavoidable negative impacts, including environmental and traffic issues, the apartment project would bring.

County Supervisor Karen Mitchoff proposed adding language to the Del Hombre approval saying that firms from the nine Bay Area counties would be given extra consideration for hiring as subcontractors on the project. Scott Youdall, a development partner with Hanover, agreed Tuesday morning to that added language.

Before the supervisors voted 5-0 to approve the Del Hombre project, Gioia supported Mitchoff's suggested labor language, and followed up with a request of John Kopchik, Contra Costa County's conservation and development director, for a report detailing the extent to which the supervisors can require local labor for large residential and commercial construction projects.

Kopchik said the supervisors can't make a local-labor requirement a formal condition of approval for such construction projects, but that the board can reject projects they don't consider to be "in the community interest." Kopchik also said he and his staff will research the matter, including its legalities, and report back to the board in the near future.

On Thursday, Gioia said he favors the county lending direct support to "pre-apprentice" programs at area school districts and community colleges, to prepare students to feed into the area labor unions' long-running apprenticeship programs. Easing the skilled-worker shortage is needed, Gioia and other supervisors said, to make requiring such workers be used much more practical.

"A perfect world is having (developers) work with the local building and trades and support their excellent programs," Gioia said Thursday.

Supervisor Diane Burgis said Tuesday that depending more on local workers is also an environmental consideration, as bringing in cheaper labor from outside the area adds traffic to local roadways. And Supervisor Federal Glover said he is interested in Kopchik's report, as hiring local workers is a key element of the county's Northern Waterfront Economic Development Initiative promoting tech and light-industrial development.

County Supervisor Candace Andersen said she welcomes a broader discussion of the local-hire issue at an upcoming board meeting.

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