SBETODAY

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Mayor, builders pushing fee cuts



Photo credit: http://dailyreporter.com

By Roger Phillips

Months after first going public with the idea, Mayor Anthony Silva and the home-building industry are pushing a fee-slashing proposal they promise will create thousands of jobs and spark Stockton's economy.

The proposal would reduce public facilities fees -- revenue the city collects from builders to pay for the costs of infrastructure and service needs that result when new developments are constructed -- by \$17,000 for 1,000 new homes throughout Stockton over a three-year period.

An additional 50 homes in each of the six City Council districts also would benefit from the proposed stimulus plan if it ultimately is adopted. The plan is to be presented at tonight's City Council meeting, and could go to a vote next month.

"Stockton is going to send a message to the rest of the country that we are a healthy city once again," Silva wrote in a text message Monday. "We have emerged from bankruptcy and now we have an opportunity to build homes once again. This smart growth will allow us to put residents and local business owners back to work. The future looks bright for our city."

The plan's sponsors say it would create 3,700 jobs, with at least 60 percent of them required to be local hires. But city officials are suggesting the council proceed with caution.

"If you offer a significant fee-waiver program, you're creating a disconnect between what the people of Stockton should expect and the resources you have to deliver that," Deputy City Manager Scott Carney said. "By definition you have less money. The question really is, what is the return on your investment, and will that return leave the city in a positive financial position or not?"

Single-family home development in Stockton has been stalled for recent memory, with roughly 300 permits issued in the past three years combined, according to officials. By comparison, during the housing boom a decade ago Stockton issued 3,000 building permits in 2003 and again in 2004.

The city's population, meanwhile, has surged to 307,000, and Director Jeff Michael of University of the Pacific's Center for Business and Policy Research said earlier this year a housing shortage is inevitable if the pace of construction does not accelerate.

Stockton's current building fees are significantly higher than in Lodi, and the proposed \$17,000 reduction to the mid-\$30,000s would bring the

city more in line with its neighbors, said John Beckman, CEO of the Building Industry Association of the Greater Valley.

Beckman, who has been pushing the proposal in tandem with Silva for months, said he is unsurprised by city officials' hesitancy to embrace the plan.

"They're cautiously neutral," he said. "Their only concern is the fear of the unknown."

Carney acknowledged concern about creating a new deficit. After all, it's still less than six months since Stockton exited Chapter 9 bankruptcy. But he also said economic activity in Stockton surged by 60 percent to \$225 million in 2014-15 compared to the previous year even as building fees remained untouched.

"We're seeing economic growth in our current structure," Carney said.

Regardless of how the larger building-fees proposal plays out, the construction industry does seem near to gaining a long-sought reduction in processing fees that

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Granite Rock Company 'Graniterock' is signatory to Operating Engineers, Laborers, Teamsters, Carpenters and Cement Masons unions. 100% performance and payment bonds will be required from a qualified surety company for the full amount of the subcontract price. Bonding assistance is available. Graniterock will pay bond premium up to 1.5%. In addition to bonding assistance, subcontractors are encouraged to contact Graniterock Estimating with questions regarding obtaining lines of credit, insurance, equipment, materials and/or supplies, or with any questions you may have. Subcontractors must possess a current contractor's license, insurance and worker's compensation coverage. Subcontractors will be required to enter into our standard contract. Graniterock intends to work cooperatively with all qualified firms seeking work on this project.

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> O'Farrell Towers 477 O'Farrell Street San Francisco, CA 94102 Bid Date: 9/1/15 @ 2 PM

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18201 Von Karman Ave, Suite 800. Irvine, CA 92612 socal.estimating@atkn.com Phone: 949-855-9755 / 949-382-7145 • NEW FAX # 949-553-0252 Contact: Andrew Nelson

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for the following project:

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All subcontractors that are registered in our SBN database will receive an invitation to bid. Please visit http://www.kiewit.com/districts/northern-california/overview.aspx to register your company to be able to receive bidding information.

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Exide cleanup: Toxic lead removal could be California's biggest yet

Removing lead-contaminated soil from thousands of homes near a closed Vernon battery recycling plant would be a years-long endeavor -- eclipsing any similar cleanup in California and ranking among the largest in the nation-- environmental officials and remediation experts said Monday.

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control announced Friday that soil testing shows decades of air pollution from the Exide Technologies facility deposited toxic dust across a wider area of southeast L.A. County than previously estimated and may have fouled as many as 10,000 homes up to 1.7 miles away.

"While we have done many lead cleanups that involve residential yards, it is safe to say that no lead cleanup of neighborhoods in California involving DTSC has approached the number of potential properties that could be involved in this case," department spokesman Sandy Nax wrote in an email Monday.

Community groups who successfully rallied for the plant's closure this year are now urging state officials to dedicate additional funds to quickly expand soil testing and clean more homes. Over the last year, contaminated soil has been removed and replaced at 146 homes closest to the facility in Maywood and Boyle Heights , with Exide footing the bill.

"Every day, week or month that goes by, our children are being exposed to the poison that is lead," said Mark Lopez, who lives a few miles from the Exide plant in East Los Angeles and heads the group East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice. "We're deeply concerned and we hope the next battle is not having to fight DTSC for the cleanup."

Exide issued a statement Monday standing by the findings of a report it commissioned and filed last week with state regulators "that establish the limits of lead impacts from the Vernon facility." The Georgia -based company has said its contributions to lead in the soil are small relative to other sources, such as paint and gasoline, limited to nearby industrial zones and do not extend into residential areas.

The preliminary results released Friday by state officials were based on soil samples from 146 additional homes spread over a two-square mile area stretching outward from the plant and into Boyle Heights , Maywood , Huntington Park and East Los Angeles . The sampling data was used to predict where similarly elevated levels of lead should be expected.

Officials with the toxic substances department have not determined how many of potentially thousands of properties will ultimately require soil cleanup, but acknowledged last week that it would be considerably more extensive and costly than anticipated.

In a deal reached in March with the U.S. attorney's office, Exide agreed to permanently close and demol-



Workers remove topsoil from homes in the 1200 block of South Indiana Street in Boyle Heights that may have been contaminated by lead from an Exide Technologies plant in Vernon. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

ish the 15-acre facility to avoid criminal charges stemming from years of environmental law violations. As part of the settlement, the company is required to pay \$50 million for a state-supervised pollution cleanup, including \$9 million to remove lead contamination from homes.

Now, the cleanup cost could balloon to tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars.

State and federal officials say the agreement with Exide requires the company to pay the full cost of cleanup, even if it exceeds \$50 million. But the toxic substances department said last week it was looking for a funding stream to pay for the cleanup while it seeks additional money from Exide and other responsible parties.

Lead is a powerful neurotoxin that can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems and diminished IQs in children and has no safe level of exposure. Because of its use throughout the years as an ingredient in gasoline, paint and batteries, the metal is one of the most common contaminants at cleanup sites across the nation.

Lead emissions from smelters, mines and battery processing facilities have resulted in extensive cleanups before, many of them through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund program to clean the nation's most hazardous sites.

Many of those were the result of pollution from secondary lead smelters, which like Exide, melted down used car batteries into raw materials for new ones. One of the largest is an EPA cleanup in Omaha, Neb., that has removed soil from the yards of more than 12,000 homes contaminated with lead emissions from a former smelter. The cleanup has been going on for more than a decade, at a cost of more than \$248 million.

Soledad Calvino , a spokeswoman for the EPA , said in an email that "there are no other large lead-soil cleanups completed in California neighborhoods comparable in size to the Exide Technologies cleanup."

Determining the extent of the contamination from a facility like Exide will be challenging and expensive, environmental cleanup experts said.

Removing the lead could take many years—but would significantly reduce health risks to young children. Those age 6 and under are most vulnerable to lead poisoning because they often play outside and ingest soil and dust.

Raina Maier , an environmental scientist who directs the Superfund Research Program at the University of Arizona , said the area around Exide "typifies the difficulties of understanding and cleaning up a large and complex historical contamination in an urban environment.... If the area impacted stretches 1.7 miles downwind from the smelter, cleanup of affected areas will require a large-scale effort."

For more environment news, follow me @tonybarboza

Source: http://california.construction.com

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the city charges on development permits. The City Council tonight is scheduled to vote on a \$1.27 million annual reduction in those fees, the equivalent of a 24 percent cut.

Beckman called the \$17,000 -a-home proposal to be introduced tonight "the watermelon." He said the permit proposal awaiting council approval tonight is "the kiwi," and he gave it a hearty endorsement Monday.

"The kiwi is awesome," Beckman said. "It's a marvelous, ripe, sensuous piece of fruit that's going to get eaten up by the council and the public at large."

Source: http://california.construction.com; (c)2015 The Record (Stockton, Calif.)