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## LOCAL

# Waste they want not; redevelopment, maybe

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April 7, 2002

By **JIM HINCH**

The Orange County Register

HUNTINGTON BEACH -- Dave Guido looks out his front-room window and sees a neighborhood of contrasts and compromises.

The wide-open sands and sparkling waves of Huntington's southernmost stretch of beach beckon less than a half-mile from his house. But down the block, an abandoned oil field still bears the rusting remains of recently demolished storage tanks.

Elsewhere, salt marshes and wetlands rub shoulders with toxic-waste dumps and power plants, while committed homeowners band together to take on absentee landlords who let their property go to seed.

Guido loves southeast Huntington Beach, an intriguing mix of tract homes and industry that seduced him as one of Orange County's last stretches of affordable real estate. But he admits it has problems.

While some residents remain wary of government attempts to help, Guido thinks a city plan to use redevelopment to clean a toxic-waste dump and one day replace it with homes could be the neighborhood's salvation.

The plan for 172 acres around AES Corp.'s seaside power plant puts Huntington on a growing list of Orange County cities using redevelopment for something other than commercial building.

Buena Park is considering an expansion of its redevelopment area to help residents fix up their homes. In 2000, Westminster officials declared the entire city a redevelopment area to help repair aging streets and houses.

Huntington's plan goes before the Planning Commission on Tuesday. The City Council could give final approval in June.

Not everyone trusts Huntington officials to make the plan work -- at least as advertised. At a recent community meeting, board members of the Southeast Huntington Beach Neighborhood Association split evenly over endorsing the proposal.

Some residents fear the city will either replace the waste dump with

another industrial development or use the tax money it generates to shore up the finances of other city redevelopment projects, said John Scott, the neighborhood association's founder.

Officials describe the plan as a kind of last chance for the area. Key to their efforts is the AES plant, whose recent renovations could boost its taxable value by \$240 million, netting the city \$2.4 million in additional tax revenue per year.

If the city adopts the plan before the end of June, it will beat a legal deadline that will enable it to keep much of the extra tax money.

The city could then use the money to clean a toxic-waste dump where Huntington's once-ubiquitous oil companies discarded poisonous byproducts, officials said.

The Ascon/Nesi Landfill, with 100 storage tanks, five lagoons and several covered pits filled with oil-drilling waste products, has long been a source of worry for nearby residents. Once it is cleaned up, a private developer could build homes, a use envisioned by the city's general plan, officials said.

Gus Duran, the city's redevelopment manager, said the federal government has reached a tentative agreement with several oil companies to clean the site up. But he said additional redevelopment funds would help the process along.

Redevelopment enables a city to keep a larger share of property taxes that it normally must send to the state.

Taxes don't go up; the city just gets a greater share.

The southeast plan is unusual for Huntington Beach, whose past redevelopment efforts focused almost exclusively on big projects downtown and at local shopping malls and office complexes.

Many of those projects drew howls of protest from residents angry about everything from changes to the city's skyline to alleged fiscal mismanagement.

Guido said residents are cautiously hopeful this proposal will be different. "The industrial problems have banded people together," he said. "Let's just get it going."



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