

# SFGate

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## Site redesign delaying Warrior's \$1 billion arena deal



The Golden State Warriors' initial arena proposal has part of the arena jutting out over the eastern edge of Piers 30-32 and doesn't leave enough room along that side to berth a cruise ship. (Rendering courtesy of Golden State Warriors)

It turns out that delay in solidifying the financial terms for the Golden State Warriors' proposed \$1 billion waterfront arena project is largely because the team is revamping the design for the site, a team representative said.

The primary issue with "Design 2.0," as one member of the arena team put it, is the plan to have a backup cruise ship berth on the eastern side of Piers 30-32, one of the few remaining deep water sites along the city's waterfront.

Having that as an option is important not only to maritime unions like the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, said a team spokesman, but also to officials on the State Lands Commission, which will look closely at whether the arena project includes a maritime use and is compatible with the public trust doctrine by enhancing public access.

"We're taking into account the feedback we get from various stakeholders, particularly the state regulators," spokesman PJ Johnston said. "There's a labor component to having this use as well."

The team and city officials had been contemplating for months the option of incorporating a backup dock for cruise ships and other large vessels. The Navy regularly uses the site to dock a ship during Fleet Week, like the USS Makin Island last year. It's also sometimes used as ships transition into dry dock at Pier 70.

The problem is the initial location of the arena, basically angled into the southeast corner of the 13-acre pier, with part of the arena jutting out over the eastern edge, doesn't leave enough room to berth a large ship there.

The design team is now looking at moving the arena away from the eastern edge of the pier. But to preserve the team's commitment to having at least 50 percent of the site as public open space, that would mean shrinking or reworking something else, like the planned 105,000 square feet of retail space. That could impact the bottom line.

And then there's the issue of views. Part of the teams' stated rationale for situating the arena back from the waterfront and angled in a corner of Piers 30-32 was to preserve as many sight lines as possible from the Embarcadero and surrounding buildings.

A group of neighbors actively opposed to putting the arena on Piers 30-32 says the planned 135-foot-tall event hall will be a major problem for views.

The Warriors maintain the ongoing redesign is sensitive to that.

"There always has been, and there continues to be, heightened sensitivity to the beauty of the building itself and the beauty of the location," Johnston said. "Views from the land as well as from the water are key elements of that. We still think it can be done in a way that provides spectacular views and is an unobtrusive as possible."

Exactly when the tweaking by architecture team Snohetta and AECOM will be done, and when the public will get to see it, is still being determined, but Johnston said it should have no impact on the plan to have the arena open in time for the 2017 NBA season.

Posted By: [John Coté \( Email \)](#) | Feb 13 at 6:10 pm

## Boxer and Feinstein seek money for repairs to bay and Marin wetlands

Posted:

marinij.com

ON THE HEELS of San Francisco Bay and adjacent Marin wetlands being given a special worldwide designation, Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer have re-introduced a bill seeking money for restoration work for the estuary.

"This bill authorizes the resources necessary to help restore tidal wetlands and improve water quality throughout the Bay Area," Feinstein said. "The San Francisco Bay is vital to the economy and ecology of Northern California and deserves our attention."

Earlier this month, the San Francisco Bay estuary and many associated wetlands in Marin were added to a list of protected areas under the 1971 "Ramsar Convention" international treaty among 163 countries meant to limit damaging development along ecologically important waterways.

The Feinstein-Boxer bill would amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to authorize the EPA to provide grant funds to address the San Francisco Estuary Program's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Program completed in 2007. It lays out a roadmap for restoring and protecting the bay.

In Marin, the program outlines a plan for a comprehensively managed wildlife refuge consisting of approximately 25,000 acres. The foundation for the refuge would be the former Hamilton Airfield, Bel Marin Keys, Bahia and other nearby areas, all of which have been acquired and have moved forward in restoration planning.

"The establishment and comprehensive management of a refuge system in east Marin County and southern Sonoma County (San Pablo Bay area) would be invaluable for endangered species recovery efforts," according to the program's report.

"San Francisco Bay is important to the economy and the environment of the whole region," said Boxer, who served on the Marin County Board of Supervisors between 1977 and 1983.

The legislation prioritizes funding for projects that will protect and restore habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and wildlife and improve and restore water quality and rearing habitat for fish.

Congress provides between \$5 million and \$7 million a year in funding for the bay, but this bill would provide an ongoing source of dollars for improvements, said Beth Huning, coordinator of the Marin-based San Francisco Bay Joint Venture which brings together public and private agencies and others to restore wetlands and wildlife habitat.

"Right now we have to rely on grant programs," she said.

This bill was approved last year by the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, of which Senator Boxer is chairwoman, but was not considered by the full Senate.

At one time, there were 196,000 acres of wetlands around San Francisco Bay, but that has been reduced to about 40,000 acres as land was diked for farming and development.

In the North Bay, up until the mid-19th century, there were some 55,000 acres of wetlands, providing ideal conditions for migrating waterfowl, acting as a nursery for a variety of fish species and an incubator for plants. A potent mix of wetlands — tidal marshes, tidal flats, vernal pools, streams and creeks — provided optimal conditions for a myriad of life.

But areas were diked and planted with oat hay, which was shipped to farms as animal feed and for use in stalls. As the wetlands dried up, so did the number of species, and today many are listed as endangered. Some 82 percent of San Pablo Bay's wetlands were diked by the time of the Great Depression. Today, about 10,000 acres remain as wetlands.

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"They are really important for wildlife, for flood control, as a water filter and for the fish," Huning said. "We think this bill will be a big boost for the bay."

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## Can Silicon Valley Adapt to Climate Change?

The high-tech mecca will have to focus its short attention span on long-term planning for sea-level rise and other global warming impacts

By Anne C. Mulkern and ClimateWire | Thursday, December 20, 2012 | 6 comments

MENLO PARK, Calif.—The headquarters of Facebook sits on a sprawling campus beside San Francisco Bay, a scenic location with water bordering three sides.

The 57-acre site features two- and three-story office buildings in shades of red and orange, outdoor basketball hoops, and sofa-sized benches on large lawns. Just outside the property, however, is a reminder that this location has a major drawback.

A roughly 8-foot levee curves next to Facebook's land. Built when Sun Microsystems owned the spot in the 1970s, the grass-covered buttress holds back water from the east. Another barricade on the north blocks the daily high tide.

As seas rise because of climate change, however, those barriers won't be enough, said those studying options to protect California's Silicon Valley.

Facebook's site at 1 Hacker Way "is pretty much surrounded by tidal waters," said Eric Mruz, manager of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, which abuts the social media giant's campus.

"Facebook is going to have to deal with sea level rise," Mruz said. "It's going to be a huge threat, with sea level rise projections skyrocketing now. They will definitely have to do something with their levees to protect their property."

Facebook is just one of the well-known companies in Silicon Valley's technology mecca that will face the effects of climate change in years ahead. Others located near the water here include Google, Yahoo, Dell, LinkedIn, Intuit, Intel, Cisco, Citrix and Oracle. Scientists predict seas will climb as much as 16 inches by midcentury and 65 inches by 2100. Storms are expected to intensify and occur more often. Both pose dangers for businesses and homes near the bay.

Yet Silicon Valley, a place that in many ways creates the future through technological advances, largely has yet to tackle the repercussions that climate change will bring in years ahead, several people said.

### 'They don't think long-term'

The life cycle of products made in Silicon Valley is "so short they don't think long-term," said Will Travis, senior adviser to the Bay Area Joint Policy Committee, which coordinates regional planning.

It's a conflict some are working to change. The region will have to start addressing the coming threats, Mruz said.

"It's imminent," Mruz said. "There's no question in my mind; everybody around the bay, we're going to have to do something, at every spot around the bay."

Much of the Golden State's coastline is at risk, experts explained, but Silicon Valley -- home to 3 million people -- is particularly vulnerable. In the early 1900s it was a series of orchards known as Valley of Heart's Delight. As water was pumped up for irrigation, the ground sank.



**ON THE WATER:** Facebook's headquarters campus is surrounded on three sides by water, and already requires a levee to keep it dry.

Image: flickr/Jitze Couperus

As a result, Silicon Valley is 3 to 10 feet below sea level, Travis said. Dirt levees exist but don't ensure protection. They weren't engineered but were pushed together when businesses later cleared land to create ponds for harvesting salt.

A draft study from the Army Corps of Engineers found that an extreme storm coupled with higher seas could top them and devastate homes and businesses.

"Starting out, they're already 10 feet below sea level," Mruz said. "If they had no levees in place, that water would be miles inland already. Add sea level rise on top of that, you add storm surge on top of that."

"All of these businesses, Silicon Valley basically backs right up to the bay," Mruz added. "You have all of them, Yahoo, Google, all right there. Without some type of flood protection potentially in front of that, you could flood that whole area. You're talking billions of dollars."

There aren't firm numbers on how much is at risk in Silicon Valley should seas rise as predicted. Santa Clara County -- located 45 miles south of San Francisco -- earlier this year won a \$1 million state grant to examine climate vulnerabilities and find potential strategies. That work is projected to take nearly three years.

### **Tech companies keeping quiet**

The Army Corps of Engineers in its draft made some estimates, but its study covered only neighborhoods closest to the bay in the southern portion of Silicon Valley.

In that region, a severe storm decades in the future could flood buildings and contents worth \$3 billion, said Mark Bierman, economics section chief in the Army Corps' San Francisco office. If the flood hits water treatment plants in Palo Alto, Sunnyvale and San Jose-Santa Clara, the total value at risk "more than doubles," he said.

Water could cover Interstate Highway 101 and state Route 237, he said. About 700,000 trips are made daily on the two freeways.

"A large enough storm will put a foot or more of water on the highway," Bierman said.

Tech companies wouldn't discuss those potential perils. Facebook, Google, Yahoo and LinkedIn declined to comment or didn't respond to requests for information. At Intuit, spokeswoman Holly Perez said, "We are thinking about this and are in the process of better understanding the science and implications behind it."

Companies also haven't shared their thinking on climate with a local business trade association, the Silicon Valley Leadership Group.

"They've been shy with us so far," said Mike Mielke, vice president for environmental programs and policy at the group. "In general, my feeling is that folks do get it in Silicon Valley," he added. "They don't have their heads in the sand. ... It's just a question of priorities and finding the right place and the right time to focus on it."

### **Sen. Feinstein wants action**

Some are pushing businesses to get involved more rapidly.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) in April urged companies to partner in raising money for better levees in the region. Those could cost \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion, said Steven McCormick, president of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, a Palo Alto, Calif.-based group focused in part on environmental conservation.

At Feinstein's request, McCormick said, the foundation is leading an effort to bring businesses, local governments, residents and others together "and make sure people understand what's at risk." To win federal and state help in the future, he said, there likely needs to be a "commitment of significant funding locally."

But among residents and businesses, McCormick said, there is "very, very, very little" grasp of what climate change could bring to the area. "What would happen if there was even modest sea level rise is just not in people's mindset or understanding," McCormick said.

Likewise, it's challenging to persuade businesses to act when extreme sea level rise is decades off, McCormick and Mielke said.

"When you talk about a 50-year time horizon in terms of sea level rise, people's eyes sort of glaze over because that's too long for planning," Mielke said, adding that most businesses don't strategize more than five years out.

Superstorm Sandy, however, sounded alarms for some.

"There are a lot more people suddenly aware of places that might be at risk" for an unusual event, said David Lewis, executive director of Save the Bay, a local environmental group. While the West Coast doesn't have hurricanes, he said, there are wind-driven storms. And an earthquake could buckle levees.

"If sea level is higher, then more areas are at risk of flooding, including at risk of flooding from a levee that breaks as a result of an earthquake," Lewis said.

The Moore Foundation is commissioning studies to quantify climate threats and potential solutions. By the end of 2013, it hopes to present local businesses with options. McClintock said he plans to make a cost-benefit argument about why action is needed.

### **'Significant risk' for some**

A total of 257 technology companies located in the flood zone are at "significant risk," Mielke said. Of those, seven or eight are "particularly vulnerable," he said.

Mielke didn't identify those companies. But the Army Corps of Engineers in its draft study found that in the southern portion of Silicon Valley, companies in danger of inundation during a severe storm 50 years from now include Yahoo, Fujitsu, Infinera and Texas Instruments.

Most of those sit steps from San Francisco Bay in Sunnyvale. Google and LinkedIn are about 10 minutes north of there, in the Shoreline Technology Park section of Mountain View. Both companies are housed slightly downhill from a golf course that is next to the bay.

There are levees, but with sea level rise and a major storm, "the bay could be overtopped and would be knocking at Google's doorstep shortly," said John Bourgeois, executive project manager with the California Coastal Conservancy.

Google's headquarters sits on a mound that's above street level, which should keep the company dry over the next few decades, Bierman said. But flooding could be just a matter of time without changes in protection, he said.

"With sea level rise, no one in that zone is risk-free," Bierman said.

Theoretically, businesses could choose to move out of the flood zone when sea levels become more of a threat, said McCormick with the Moore Foundation. But there's not much land available at higher elevations, he said.

"An individual company may think, 'Well, I could move.' But when you start thinking, if all of those companies are going to move, where are they all going to go?" McCormick said.

### **New levee near Facebook?**

The San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority -- an alliance of local water and flood control agencies -- is studying the feasibility of building a new levee in the Menlo Park area.

"This right here we're looking at is actually below sea level," the group's executive director, Len Materman, said last month as he gestured at the wildlife refuge that's in front of Facebook's campus. "It doesn't take a lot of water for an area that's at or below sea level to be totally inundated."

The San Francisco Bay is just outside that refuge. Without the existing salt pond levees, Materman said, a high tide or tsunami could swamp the area and flood across to the freeway more than a mile away.

The Joint Powers Authority has had only preliminary conversations with Facebook about a new barricade, Materman said.

"I know that they want to bring in more employees ... that's their priority," Materman said. "Their priority is not flood protection or ecosystem protection. Their top priority is not what we're doing. We're proceeding. We hope to do it with the benefit of Facebook's participation."

Right now, however, there's only money to study and develop plans for a levee. The Joint Powers Authority would need to find funding to actually built the barricade. That could involve asking residents to raise their taxes, Materman said.

A proposal could be "targeted to a selection of parcels that pay a much, much higher and escalating amount in flood insurance and are otherwise directly benefited by the [levee] project," he said.

"So we are very hopeful that it can get the required two-thirds vote" for a special tax, or a majority vote for an assessment of the amount needed, Materman said.

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## Warriors arena plan welcomes big ships

Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross, Chronicle Columnists  
Published 5:05 pm, Saturday, February 16, 2013

It was a nice try, but state officials just didn't buy the Golden State Warriors' pitch that their proposed \$1 billion waterfront arena plan had the legally required maritime connection - a kayak ramp.

The State Lands Commission had something a little more substantial in mind - like, say, a berth big enough to park an aircraft carrier.

And that's why - after a couple of meetings and a push from the politically powerful International Longshore and Warehouse Union - the team went back to the drawing board and agreed to push its 17,000-seat arena 50 feet back from the water at Piers 30-32.

Besides providing space for a backup cruise-ship berth, the extra breathing room could accommodate a dock for the Navy to use during Fleet Week.

"That's pretty much it," said **Jesse Blout**, a development consultant working on the arena deal for the Warriors.

As for the kayak ramp, it stays.

The nominal linkage to the water is a key hurdle for the arena deal to clear. The Giants secured their permit for AT&T Park by providing for ferry service to the ballpark and touting the spectacular bay views from the stands.

The Warriors' change isn't likely to satisfy neighbors worried about the arena blocking views and adding to congestion. But spending an extra \$8 million to \$11 million for a big ship berth may be enough to win the state commission's approval - especially if the longshore union is on board.

**Making waves:** San Francisco water officials, the East Bay Municipal Utility District and four other water agencies are questioning Gov. **Jerry Brown's** plan to build a pair of massive tunnels in the delta to send water south.

Brown pitched the two 35-mile tunnels - along with the high-speed rail line - as his biggest infrastructure goals during his State of the State speech last month. The tunnels would divert water from the Sacramento River around the delta and south at a cost of between \$14 billion and \$18 billion.

But in a Jan. 16 letter to outgoing U.S. Interior Secretary **Ken Salazar** and state Natural Resources Agency Secretary **John Laird**, executives of the six water agencies said the project carried "unquantified risks," from its cost and environmental impacts to the possibility of years of litigation.

The letter from EBMUD, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and water agencies in Alameda, Contra Costa and San Diego counties - along with San Diego Mayor **Bob Filner** - was nearly identical to missives from environmental groups opposed to the mega-project.

"At the end of the day, everyone is supportive of a sustainable bay-delta solution," said **Tyrone Jue**, a spokesman for the San Francisco agency, which runs the Hetch Hetchy water system. "The trick has always been balancing water-supply costs and environmental interests."

Natural Resources Agency spokesman **Richard Stapler** said the letter seemed to "be a little political" - and predicted it would be a topic when his boss meets with San Francisco water officials this week.

"Secretary Laird is not always known for holding his tongue," he said.

**Rambo meets Marin:** To the surprise of many Marinites, the Sheriff's Department has just been given the nod to buy a \$368,000, armor-plated assault vehicle - to be used by its newly created Weapons of Mass Destruction Unit.

Money for the unit and the BearCat G3 van - which will be shared by Marin, Sonoma, Napa and Solano counties - comes from homeland security grants. The idea is to help law enforcement handle "chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive" situations, according to a sheriff's memo.

This in mellow Marin, where county Supervisor **Steve Kinsey** concedes that "the biggest thing we have is protests over dog walkers."

"It's humorous on one level and expensive on another, but ultimately it's about public safety," Kinsey said.

Sheriff's Lt. **Barry Heying** tells us he doesn't think Marin is on any terrorist hit list.

"But we are pretty sure that the Golden Gate Bridge would be a tempting target," he said, "and we want to be prepared."

*San Francisco Chronicle* columnists Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross appear Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays. Matier can be seen on the KPIX-TV morning and evening news. He can also be heard on KCBS radio Monday through Friday at 7:50 a.m. and 5:50 p.m. Got a tip? Call (415) 777-8815, or e-mail [matierandross@sfchronicle.com](mailto:matierandross@sfchronicle.com)

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San Francisco Bay (file)

## Related



[SPECIAL REPORT: Scientists predict SF Bay to rise significantly over decades](#)

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It's said most major cultures have a flood story: Noah and the ark for Christians, Muslims and Jews; Gilgamesh for the Babylonians; or the Pachachama floods from the Incas, for example.

And now global warming or climate change for modern times may make those stories come alive again in this century.

Whether you agree with the science or not, preparations are underway in the Bay Area in hopes of dealing with the possibility of Bay waters rising -- and rising dramatically during the next three generations.

"The Bay is huge," noted Larry Goldzband, executive director of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. "The Bay has actually about 500 miles of shoreline."

"The Bay will fundamentally change. And we need to accept that," added Goldzband.

Ironically, the BCDC formed in the late 1960s in response to the public outcry over the shrinking of the Bay because of fill.

Today, the BCDC finds itself having to protect the Bay from growing too large.

"For example, you could be talking about sea walls," Goldzband said. "Practically, the question is 'what can we afford not to do.' "

How bad could it be?

A futuristic map designed by a British computer scientist visualizes what could happen here in the bay area if the waters rise.

Climate scientists say that by 2030, the Bay could rise by a full foot; by 2050, two feet; and by the turn of the next century, just under 6 feet.

In this scenario, the critical Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta becomes completely submerged.

And what about developments now proposed around the Bay?

Developer Mike Ghielmetti is planning to build a 5,000-population neighborhood on an industrial wasteland along the Oakland shoreline just south of Jack London Square. It's called "Oak-to-Ninth."

"The project is about 65 acres," Ghielmetti said. "About half of it will be new parks, about the size of Marina Green (in San Francisco) and the rest of it will be new development: condominiums, new retail, and new marinas.

"When we were approved by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission a little over a year and half ago we were the first project to meet their new guidelines."

That means raising the land by about three feet and engineering to hold back or channel rising waters.

In Sacramento, state officials who pay attention to the Delta's controversial situation say their best research suggests the Bay will rise no more than 39 inches by the turn of the century, but even that means drastic changes for the entire San Francisco Bay Area.

## Warriors arena would block beauty of bay

Ann Killion

Updated 11:22 pm, Thursday, February 14, 2013

After a breathtakingly fast start, the Warriors were bound to cool off. To come back to earth.

I'm not talking about this season's performance on the court. I'm talking about the organization's proposed waterfront arena.

The Warriors burst out early, with aggressive play and strong defense and got lots of people, including the Board of Supervisors and Mayor Ed Lee, to wave their pom-poms and cheer every move.

But now comes the tricky part. The project to build a 13-story arena on Piers 30-32 just south of the Bay Bridge on the San Francisco waterfront is about to enter the environmental impact review. And this is the part I've been waiting for. The "what the heck are you thinking?" stage of the process.

This is not a dissertation on whether it's morally right for the Warriors to abandon the city of Oakland and the denizens of Oracle Arena who have supported them through all the terrible times. The Warriors' new ownership made it clear from the moment they bought the team - from their debut press conference at a restaurant on the Embarcadero to their insistence on holding most team functions at a San Francisco hotel - that they want to move across the bay.

Nor is this a treatise on the need for a nice arena in San Francisco to hold a variety of events (yes, let Bruce Springsteen play in the city) or the impact of two years of construction on one of the city's already most-congested arteries (it will be horrendous) or the importance of keeping Red's Java House on its present site.

Rather, this is a simple thought about the thing that makes San Francisco uniquely San Francisco: our beautiful waterfront. Why - on so many environmental and aesthetic levels - would you want to build an enormous structure directly in the bay?

"There are a lot of issues and concerns," said David Lewis, the director of Save the Bay.

Save the Bay was founded almost 50 years ago to combat what was - at the time - a modern vision of progress: filling in the bay and building structures right on top of the water. Half a century later, haven't we learned that this isn't the best use of our waterfront land?

### Freeway in the way

Newbies to the city will forget that our waterfront once was mostly walled off from us, both by working piers and by a concrete monstrosity called the Embarcadero Freeway. But after the Loma Prieta earthquake, the damaged freeway was torn down, there was less hard-core maritime activity along the Embarcadero and suddenly the waterfront opened up to the public. Sweeping vistas. A sense of openness. A synergy between land and water.

We are supremely lucky to have as much gorgeous waterfront access as we do. But now the Warriors want to turn one stretch of open bayfront property into an 18,000-seat, billion-dollar arena.

"We have to protect our precious asset," said former mayor Art Agnos, who pushed for the removal of the Embarcadero Freeway. "To put that structure over the water and destroy the advances that we've made in that part of the city would be an abomination."

Aside from the aesthetic issues, with our newfound awareness about climate change and rising tides, does building an arena on the water seem like the smartest, most environmentally sound move?

The Warriors want to compare the proposed building to other iconic waterfront landmarks like the Sydney Opera House. They might want to also note that recent studies show that the Sydney Opera House is considered at considerable risk because of climate change.

### Look cool on TV

The Warriors' owners - with their Hollywood state of mind - want a building that will look cool on television, be used in movie shots and engender envy. But there are other spots in San Francisco that probably would be more appropriate for an arena.

The Warriors have met any arguments against the proposed arena by challenging their doubters if they felt the same about AT&T Park. But when AT&T Park was built in the late 1990s, that side of the city was vastly different, in terms of density and traffic. And the ballpark wasn't built out into the bay, but on an inlet.

The Warriors' most compelling argument is that Piers 30-32 are crumbling, and they're providing a much-needed service by renovating the piers. The \$120 million cost of refurbishing the pilings is built into the billion-dollar cost of the arena, which the Warriors promise will be privately financed.

It's true that the old pier is just an empty parking lot now and that the decaying structure needs to be replaced.

**Obsolete in 2 decades?**

But is that worth trading away a piece of the waterfront forever, particularly for a building which - if the sports climate continues at its current pace - will likely be considered obsolete within two decades?

Lewis and his organization are concerned about what else might be approved if the Warriors arena sails through the process.

"It's the precedent," Lewis said. "If this is considered appropriate pier use, where do you draw the line?"

There's been a lot of civic boosterism surrounding the arena: Mayor Lee, who is watching the 49ers pack up and move, even included the theoretical arena in his plans for bidding for the 2024 Olympics.

But an arena won't make San Francisco special. What makes San Francisco special is what the Warriors arena would block off: our beautiful waterfront.

*Ann Killion is a San Francisco Chronicle columnist. E-mail: [akillion@sfgate.com](mailto:akillion@sfgate.com) Twitter: [@annkillion](https://twitter.com/annkillion)*

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**The New York Times**

February 13, 2013

# Going With the Flow

By **MICHAEL KIMMELMAN**

OVERDIEPSE POLDER, WASPIK, THE NETHERLANDS — When Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York proposed the other day to spend up to \$400 million to buy and raze homes in the floodplains damaged by [Hurricane Sandy](#), I thought of Nol Hooijmaijers.

Some dozen years ago the Dutch government ordered Mr. Hooijmaijers to vacate the farmland that he and his family shared with 16 other farmers so it could be turned into a river spillway for occasional floods. I visited Mr. Hooijmaijers recently. He and his wife, Wil, served coffee in their new farmhouse and showed off the new stall for their cows.

How they and their neighbors responded to that government order, and how in turn the government dealt with their response, is a story that might now interest Mr. Cuomo and other New Yorkers.

It has been to the Netherlands, not surprisingly, that some American officials, planners, engineers, architects and others have been looking lately. New York is not Rotterdam (or Venice or New Orleans, for that matter); it's not mostly below or barely above sea level. But it's not adapted to what seems likely to be increasingly frequent extreme storm surges, either, and the Netherlands has successfully held back the sea for centuries and thrived. After the North Sea flooded in 1953, devastating the southwest of this country and killing 1,835 people in a single night, Dutch officials devised an ingenious network of dams, sluices and barriers called the Deltaworks.

Water management here depends on hard science and meticulous study. Americans throw around phrases like once-in-a-century storm. The Dutch, with a knowledge of water, tides and floods honed by painful experience, can calculate to the centimeter — and the Dutch government legislates accordingly — exactly how high or low to position hundreds of dikes along rivers and other waterways to anticipate storms they estimate will occur once every 25 years, or every 1,000 years, or every 10,000.

And now the evidence is leading them to undertake what may seem, at first blush, a counterintuitive approach, a kind of about-face: The Dutch are starting to let the water in. They are contriving to live with nature, rather than fight (what will inevitably be, they have come to realize) a losing battle.

Why? The reality of rising seas and rivers leaves no choice. Sea barriers sufficed half a century ago; but they're disruptive to the ecology and are built only so high, while the waters keep rising. American officials who now tout sea gates as the one-stop-shopping solution to protect Lower Manhattan should take notice. In lieu of flood control the new philosophy in the Netherlands is controlled flooding.

Governor Cuomo's plan would turn properties in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island into parks, bird sanctuaries and dunes that could act as buffer zones for inland development. The idea is to give homeowners an incentive (perhaps up to \$300,000) to move voluntarily out of areas where, in hindsight, single-family houses shouldn't have been built in the first place. The Dutch have pursued a more aggressive and complex relocation strategy.

They are, by temperament, almost as allergic as Americans to top-down programs that impinge on personal and property rights; but water safety trumps pretty much every other priority in a country where 60 percent of the nation's gross domestic product is produced below sea level. Protecting the country from storms and floods isn't treated here merely as a burden or a political football but as an economic and architectural opportunity.

The local buzzword is "multifunctional." The Dutch are putting retail and offices on top of new dikes, designing public squares and garages to double as catch basins for rain and floodwater, constructing floating houses and reservoirs that create recreational opportunities.

I enlisted Tracy Metz to help me find useful lessons for New York in the Dutch example. An architecture critic based in Amsterdam, she is the co-author, with Maartje van den Heuvel, an art historian, of "Sweet & Salt: Water and the Dutch," which should be required reading these days. Ms. Metz called in some Dutch officials and architects, and she took me to see the Maeslantkering, the giant sea gate guarding Rotterdam, the last of the Deltaworks, as big and spectacular as a pair of Eiffel towers, on their sides, which slide closed.

Europe's busiest port and the Netherlands' second biggest city, Rotterdam lies some 20 feet below sea level, so it relies on this immense barrier — and, it turns out, on faith. Rotterdam, in fact the whole of the Netherlands, has no evacuation plan should the floodwaters breach the levees, a calamity that could dwarf what happened in New Orleans. If Americans spend too much energy and capital on emergency relief and recovery after disasters have already struck, and not nearly enough on anticipating and mitigating trouble, the Dutch have achieved so much for so long in flood prevention that much of their population, even in sitting-duck places like Rotterdam, has been lulled into complacency.

That said, American politicians, including those who argued to cut back on money for preventive measures after Sandy, might want to see how the Dutch have managed to improve

public life, public space and the landscape at a fraction of the billions American taxpayers pay out for repairing hurricane damage.

A good place to start is the newly completed waterfront development at Scheveningen, a coastal district of The Hague, where the Catalan architect Manuel de Solà-Morales and his firm fashioned a dike into a graceful, snaking seaside boulevard, nearly two miles long. Even in the freezing cold I saw crowds strolling the boulevard, the Netherlands' version of the Coney Island boardwalk, designed so that the pedestrian bridge leading from the beach to the city will break into harmless pieces in the event of a catastrophic flood.

The centerpiece of Dutch water management now is Room for the River, a decades-long \$3 billion program. It consists of nearly 40 interlinked infrastructure projects to mitigate climate change along the rivers and waterways that weave through the Netherlands.

Dikes are being lowered, spillways created. Many of the projects have faced legal battles and predictable public protests. People are being uprooted, lands repurposed. But the benefits are clear and widely shared.

So, for example, West 8, the Dutch firm now reshaping Governors Island in New York City, won the commission to design the bridges and pumping stations for Noordwaard, a Room for the River initiative to convert a vast polder, half an hour's drive from Rotterdam, into a reservoir for occasional controlled flooding. The plan recuperates what had been a natural lake centuries ago, colonized as farmland. Dikes will be adjusted; walking paths added; panoramic decks constructed on the stations, so that the whole area, while continuing to support farming, can become a destination for hikers, skaters and bicyclists.

Another Room for the River project is the Overdiepse Polder, in the southeastern province of Brabant, an hour's or so drive south of Amsterdam. It gets back to where we started: where Nol Hooijmaijers and his wife live.

Polders are reclaimed marshes, floodplains and other low-lying lands, surrounded by dikes. By lowering the dike along the northern edge of the two-square-mile Overdiepse Polder, the Bergse Maas canal will be able to spill in, diminishing the water level in the canal by a foot, enough to spare the 140,000 residents of Den Bosch, upriver, in the event of once-every-25-year floods. By displacing farmers, in other words, residents in that city can breathe a little easier.

Naturally the project didn't go over well with Mr. Hooijmaijers and the other residents of the Overdiepse Polder when it was announced in 2000, any more than it would go over well with homeowners on the New Jersey Shore or in the Rockaways if government officials ordered

them to leave.

But here's where the Dutch example is instructive. The government did not ask for volunteers to leave. It made a decision, based on real numbers and the economy of the area. The polder would be used as a spillway. The farms would have to go. The farmers would be compensated, but staying wasn't an option: a tough, greater-good decision that American politicians tend to avoid like kryptonite.

Rather than try to sue for more money or fight the plan, as farmers elsewhere did over other elements of Room for the River, the residents of Overdiepse Polder came up with a novel idea: Yes, the polder would become a spillway but the government should build a number of mounds along the southern edge onto which a half-dozen or more of the farmers could resettle. The mounds would be large enough (roughly 20 acres) to accommodate new farmhouses and sheds, and high enough (20 feet above the level of the polder) to keep dry. There wouldn't be enough room for 17 mounds, so some of the farmers would have to leave. Constructing eight mounds, as it turned out, was the right number.

Mr. Hooijmaijers organized the farmers. Negotiations were grueling and took years. "Every farmer thinks he has the best farm in the world," is how he put it to me. In the meantime one farmer moved to Canada. Another died. "We had been a village, a community, and then in a moment, when the government said, 'You have to go,' you become each other's competitors," Mr. Hooijmaijers recalled. "But we came together, and the government was very reasonable. It wanted to help."

Through the picture windows in the Hooijmaijers' new, airy, modern farmhouse, designed by Wil's brother, an architect, I got a view of one end of the polder. In the other direction was the old farmhouse, cozy but cramped. With the money the government paid to buy and eventually raze it, the Hooijmaijers had a down payment for the new house, which they finally moved into toward the end of last year. "The lesson is that these things are not easy," Mr. Hooijmaijers said, "but they work out if there is cooperation and participation."

Another way to phrase it is that hard decisions need to be made to cope with rising waters and severe weather. Notwithstanding the obvious difference between a group of farmers on a Dutch polder and communities in the Rockaways or Coney Island, good government makes those decisions while giving affected residents adequate knowledge and agency: the ability to make choices, and the responsibility to live by them.

Politically that may be trickier than commissioning sea barriers or making dikes into boardwalks or redesigning waterfronts and neighborhoods to accommodate floods and storms.

But it's necessary. And it may be the most important lesson that the Netherlands has to offer at the moment.

## Bay Area leaders consider merging region

By *MARTHA MENDOZA* Associated Press News Fuze

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SAN JOSE, Calif.—Hundreds of business and political leaders gathered in San Jose to consider the advantages of merging the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley into a single region, sharing everything from city dumps to water treatment plants as communities sprawl across borders.

Leaders attending the State of the Valley conference Friday noted that Bay Area residents, businesses and local governments face the same challenges, from gridlock and earthquakes to steep housing prices and climate change.

They said the region, which amounts to the world's 13th-largest economy, should continue to boom if they coordinate their planning and consider merging transit systems, police and fire services and even city governments.

Technology forecaster Paul Saffo told conference participants that sharing everything from landfills to police helicopters could make the entire area more efficient, save money and help businesses remain competitive.

"Powerful regions are the new basic unit of governments in the 21st century," said Saffo, pointing to Singapore and Hong Kong. "City states are the powerful nexus of power, commerce, culture and identity."

Stretching from the rolling vineyards in north Sonoma County to the sprawling estates of southern Santa Clara County, the Bay Area has 6.9 million residents living in 101 cities, centered in the tech-rich Silicon Valley and San Francisco.

One simple start would be to get the 27 separate transit systems that residents currently navigate to look and feel like one, with the same paint, fares and a merged schedule, said Egon Terplan, a regional planning director at the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association.

He said the Bay Area should look to examples like Washington, D.C., for inspiration on putting jobs near transit. And he said Portland and Minneapolis have managed to coordinate neighboring governments and services.

The conference follows the release of a 2013 Index of Silicon Valley this week which found the region is leading the country out of the recession with 92,000 new jobs last year. And the report found those jobs are well paid, high-tech positions: a San Jose high school graduate earns 60 percent more than a college graduate in Flint, Mich., the report said.

The index and the conference were sponsored by Joint Venture Silicon Valley Network and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, both nonprofits associated with the region's businesses and governments.