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LIVING IN THE BAY AREA



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Peninsula Landing is one of the successful housing developments in Redwood Shores

Redwood Shores: a little new town

By Bradley Inman
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

MOBIL LAND Development executive Don Warren proudly refers to Mobil's Redwood Shores development as a "new-town that works"—though he admits that the original vision for this waterfront community located twenty-five miles south of San Francisco has been scaled back substantially.

In the 1960s, "new towns" were touted as a panacea for all of our urban ills. Using the latest

design and planning gimmicks, building cities from the ground up promised trouble-free, integrated and self-sufficient environments where people could happily live, work and play. Absent the hassles of the urban scene, they were destined to become utopia.

Good intentions turned sour, however.

After sinking millions of dollars into several failed efforts, the federal government abandoned their new town ventures. And the private sector "new-town" landscape was strewn with financial losers—leaving several devel-

opment firms in ruins.

Situated around a man-made lagoon that is the site of rowing regattas, the 1465-acre Redwood Shores development also followed a perilous economic course. Originally the brain child of Leslie Properties, Inc., the company planned to create a new community of more than 100,000 residents.

In the early 70s and after putting \$30 million into their grand scheme, however, Leslie Properties went bankrupt, and Bank of America and the Bank of Tokyo became the new landowners.

In 1973, after an international

search to find a new developer, Mobil stepped in and bought the land which is located entirely on bay fill.

The first thing Mobil did was modify the ambitious plans of the previous developer. Approved by the City of Redwood City in 1978—which has jurisdiction over Redwood Shores—the current plan calls for 20,000 people, 7,000 housing units and four million square feet of office and retail space.

Today, Redwood Shores has 6,500 people, 2400 housing units

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and 1.5 million square feet of office space and a small convenience shopping center. In my view, its current scale would probably disqualify Redwood Shores as a new town, but at buildout when further amenities are added, it should meet the test.

Among other things, Mobil has plans for a shopping center and an executive health club is in the works. After completing the expanded Holly Street interchange off 101 and cleaning up its gateway appearance, Redwood Shores will achieve that contained new-town look.

Dubbed Shores Center, the commercial buildings face the Bayshore-Freeway. Corporate giants with facilities in Shores Center include Fluor Corporation, Oral B Inc., DILL Worldwide Express, and Northern Telecom.

Fifteen distinct residential developments are located further east towards the bay in and around a series of waterways. Considering the fact that Redwood Shores is located in an upscale bedroom community where land prices are high, it has a surprising mix of new livable residential neighborhoods.

It has condos, waterfront townhomes and single-family residences, moderately-priced apartments and an affordable cooperative development. Prices range from \$140,000 on the condominiums to \$450,000 for some of the single-family homes located on the water.

With names like Peninsula Landing, Shorebird Island, Beacon Shores, and the Boardwalk, the housing developments in Redwood Shores have received an array of awards for innovative design and planning.

The apartments have an institutional look but they are packed with the latest lifestyle amenities and rent for \$725 to \$1,070 per month—reasonable for the setting.

Redwood Shore's unique housing mix gives the community an unusual age variety—with both young families and empty nesters.

In other parts of the country, there are a handful of successful new towns such as Columbia in Maryland, Reston in Virginia, Irvine Ranch in southern California. But in northern California the idea has lost its luster.

In 1980, Governor Jerry Brown introduced legislation that would have expedited the creation of five new towns in California. But when the bill was publicly tainted with special interest development agendas, Brown was forced to veto his own proposal.

Moreover, the deep-pocket boys that are willing to make the invest-



Beacon Shores: another successful single family development in Redwood Shores

Martin Kume

ment in a new town have become a rare breed.

And their fears are aggravated by a skeptical electorate and suspicious environmental activists who are quick to squelch mega-plans for mega-communities.

For example, plans to broaden the scale of Redwood Shores was killed by these concerns. In 1984, Mobil received approval from the

city to develop South Shores, a big parcel of land south of Redwood Shores. After local citizens objected, however, a ballot measure was approved which turned the lights out on this piece of the planned community.

Maybe we no longer have the guts to experiment with big solutions.

On My Livable and Sensible

Scale: If you like it new, if you like the water, and if you want to be insulated from urban life, Redwood

Shores is worth exploring. In the Bay Area, it's as close as we get to a new town.