

Balanced development

THE CONCORD CITY Council took a major step forward on Monday with its unanimous vote approving a promising plan for development of the shuttered Concord Naval Weapons Station.

The city wisely took time to consider several options and give the public ample opportunity to offer ideas and criticisms of developing the 5,170 acres of land in the heart of Contra Costa County.

Only then did the council make its decision in time to meet the January deadline imposed by the Navy.

The plan approved by Concord is a well-thought-out mixture of open space, clustered residential villages, commercial development, high-density mixed-use development around the North Concord BART Station, recreational facilities and a new Cal State University East Bay campus.

About 64 percent of the land will be open space. There also will be parks and large green corridors between the villages and the CSU East Bay campus.

After some debate, Concord leaders made the right choice in deciding to include clustered villages in the plan. These residential areas will include low-, medium- and high-density housing for a broad range of buyers.

Clustered villages allow for larger areas of open space and offer easier access for current residents of Concord and nearby cities to get to the proposed sports complex, open space and the new CSU East Bay campus.

Also, the villages will have more affordable homes for people with modest incomes.

Environmentalists rightly favor clustered villages over the usual suburban sprawls because they use land more efficiently, make it easier for residents to use public transportation and allow most of the land to remain open space.

Still, if the final plans are similar to the one approved by Concord, there will be considerable growth. The plan allows for up to 12,300 housing units and an increase of almost 29,000 people.

We are particularly pleased with plans for a new CSU East Bay campus, which will offer easier access for more students than the current campus because it will be closer to a major freeway, Highway 4, and BART.

The development plan also includes a requirement for future developers to put \$38 million toward measure to help the homeless. That is a small fraction of the total investment that will be made on the transit villages and commercial property.

On the whole, we believe Concord did a fine job of balancing differing interests. There is plenty of open space, parks and recreational facilities, along with transit development and a variety of homes in environmentally sensitive cluster villages.

The next step is for the city to approve its final plan and environmental study this spring. Then the Navy could sell the land to developers by the spring of 2010. How fast development will take place remains uncertain and will depend largely on the speed of the region's economic recovery. But we trust that the final product will be a major asset for the city and the region.