

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Once Spurned by Developers, Shut-Down Military Bases Are Now Sought-After Sites

Wall Street Journal

Michael Corkery

October 26, 2005

When the military announces another round of base closings, the news sends chills through cities and towns fearful of losing a source of good jobs and a steady flow of cash generated by the troops.

Not so in Concord, Calif. The city, located about 20 miles from Oakland, actually asked federal officials to shut down the Concord Naval Weapons Station, hoping to develop the land. The Defense Department agreed to close a roughly 5,200-acre portion of the property -- quite enough to stir up Concord.

"Everybody is very, very excited about it," says Jim Forsberg, Concord's director of planning and economic development. "It represents a major opportunity to do good things for our city."

The Concord property is on the current list of U.S. military base closings that has been approved by President Bush. If Congress doesn't reject that list in the next two weeks or so it becomes law. Thanks to the hot real-estate

market and some high-profile successes with former bases, the current wave of closings is very different from past efforts. Some cities and towns are eager to start planning what to do with these bases, and big-name real-estate developers are angling for the properties.

Even the military, which in the past has often given the land to local communities, has caught on to the real-estate boom.

In the current round of base closings, developers expect the military will try to sell more former bases at market value, potentially bringing millions into the federal coffers. This shift sparked a niche industry of insurers, lawyers and lobbyists specializing in turning massive tracts of government land into housing, shopping centers and parks. The Navy, which by the nature of its business owns lots of valuable waterfront property, has hired real-estate consulting firm Jones Lang LaSalle to advise it.

"It used to be 'Clean it up, give it to city,' " says Jill Votaw, a spokeswoman for the Navy's program-management office for Base Realignment and Closure. "The current administration says, 'Wait a minute that property is worth some money -- maybe we should get some back for the taxpayers.'"

Some sought-after properties on the 2005 BRAC list, according to developers and the Association of Defense Communities, might include the Concord Naval Weapons Station, Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Fort Monmouth in New Jersey and the main campus of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in northern Washington, D.C.

Developers, like Lennar Corp. and Actus Lend Lease, are actively analyzing the properties. Others are quietly assessing opportunities and waiting to pounce on some of the 22 major bases that were ordered closed by the commission.

"I can't imagine all the significant developers in the U.S. are not doing what we are," says Jeffrey Simon, a senior vice president of development at Actus Lend Lease, a subsidiary of Australian developer Lend Lease. "They are looking at the

list, putting together what they know about the properties and when the time is right they will go after them."

Towns like Concord hope to replicate what happened at the El Toro Marine Air Corps Station in Orange County, Calif., just west of Irvine, which was sold early this year in a closely watched auction.

Lennar, one of the country's biggest home builders, paid the federal government \$649 million, one of the highest prices ever paid for a shuttered base. The sale came after years of squabbling between local government officials over the fate of the 3,700-acre tract of land in the red-hot market of Southern California. The parcel that Lennar bought is zoned for 3,400 homes, three million square feet of research and development space, several golf courses, a cemetery and university campus. A large portion of the land will become park space.

"I don't know where you are going to find that much land in a land-constrained market," says Emile Haddad, president of Lennar's Western region.

To be sure, there are some properties that will be a tough sell because of their remote location or serious pollution issues. For example, the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant, which is on the closure list, is located in rural southeastern Kansas about 115 miles north of Tulsa, Okla.

Local disagreements and indecision have kept several bases empty and forlorn for years after they close, despite their prime locations. Near Boston, local officials have come up with three different redevelopment plans for the former South Weymouth (Mass.) Naval Air Station, which was closed in 1997, although local redevelopment officials are confident the latest plan will work. In San Francisco, the Navy has been negotiating for years with the city over the terms of transferring a former naval station on Treasure Island, located in San Francisco Bay.

In January, the Government Accountability Office reported that as of Sept. 30, 2004, the military still owned 28% of the land from

previous closure rounds, mostly because of environmental cleanup issues.

Pentagon officials say they are learning from their mistakes and figuring out better ways to dispose of the land than in the previous round of closures, which began in the mid-1990s, following the end of the Cold War.

Developers say they have more information about pollution on the bases, which helps them determine whether the properties are worth investing in. Based on this information, developers can assess the risks of developing these properties and local communities can be more realistic about their chances for reuse.

The improved information also allows the military to divide up large installations and transfer the less polluted pieces for redevelopment. Another tool helping developers is environmental insurance, which they say reduces the risk they face if pollutants are found on the site.

Environmental problems, "just don't have the disqualifying affects that they did previously," says Actus Lend Lease's Mr. Simon.

One of the biggest changes in this round of base closures could be the real-estate market itself, which has dramatically raised the value of some of the bases. In 2002, the Navy auctioned off a Naval medical center in the hills of Oakland to a local church for \$22.5 million. But when the church couldn't pay the bill, the sale fell through.

A second auction for the medical center started in August and as of yesterday the top bid was \$93.5 million

In Concord, city officials are eager to begin the planning process for the Naval property, but they want to be sensitive to residents' concerns about traffic, open-space preservation and housing.

Even though the military hasn't closed that portion of the naval station yet, the pressures are mounting. When Mr. Forsberg attended a conference recently about reusing military bases,

he was treated like a celebrity. Real-estate consultants and developers were buzzing about the city's Naval installation. "They said, 'Concord. Let's talk,'" says Mr. Forsberg.

Mr. Forsberg says the city is looking for money to hire consultants to help study a reuse plan. Developers have offered to help. But, Mr. Forsberg says they will find the funds elsewhere.

"There is going to be a lot of pressures on the community to go go go -- but we have to get this right," he says.

House expected to let base-closure list stand

Plan would shift jets, jobs to local Guard

Fort Wayne Journal Gazette

Sylvia A. Smith

October 25, 2005

WASHINGTON – The House likely will kill a move this week to overrule the recommendations of a civilian panel to close or merge 55 military bases, including a transfer of jobs and jets that would expand Fort Wayne's Air National Guard unit.

"The numbers aren't there," said Paul Hirsh, a member of a past Base Closure and Realignment Commission, referring to the number of lawmakers whose districts are hurt by the military realignment recommendations.

In the House, 218 votes are needed to approve something.

If the recommendations become law, the 122nd Fighter Wing will gain 322 jobs and three F-16 fighter jets, swelling the unit to about 600 jobs and 18 jets.

Even the author of the resolution to reject the recommendations, Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill., said he expects to lose. But he is pressing the point because he objects to the Pentagon's plan to move all the fighter jets from the Air National Guard base at Springfield, Ill., to Fort Wayne.

To block the recommendations of the closure commission, which President Bush approved, both the House and Senate must pass a resolution of disapproval.

No senator filed a mirror resolution to LaHood's by the deadline.

The panel recommended closing 22 major bases and reconfiguring 33 others. Several facilities the Defense Department wanted to close were removed from the list. Others the Pentagon did not recommend changing will be closed as a result of the panel's action.

Hirsh, who now lobbies on behalf of communities that were on the Pentagon's wish-list of closures, said no one should think that nothing will change at military bases that are not on the list of 55.

He said that through its budget, the Pentagon can make adjustments – to downsize, for instance – a military base as long as the changes don't trip a threshold. Those changes could apply to Reserve or National Guard units.

Federal law says the Pentagon can close a base if fewer than 300 civilian jobs are eliminated and can realign a military installation if fewer than 1,000 civilian jobs, or 50 percent of the base's civilian jobs, would be shifted. If there are more than that number of affected civilian jobs, the proposal must go through a BRAC process.

Local News Articles

BRAC fighter confident of depot's safety

Texarkana Gazette (Texarkana, TX)

Greg Bischof

October 26, 2005

NEW BOSTON, Texas—Although the Base Realignment and Closure Commission cost Bowie County some jobs this year, Jerry Sparks told the commissioners Monday that most of the occupations targeted for elimination remain intact.

Sparks, who chairs the Texarkana Chamber of Commerce's BRAC Advisory Committee, told

the court the decision to take Red River Army Depot off the Pentagon's closure list will likely remain safe through the congressional process it will go through next month.

Sparks reported that this year's effort to save the depot resulted in saving about 80 percent of RRAD's jobs.

He said \$850,000 was raised locally to fight the closure.

"I also want to thank the commissioners court for the county's financial contribution to the effort, as well as (Bowie County) Judge (James) Carlow for leading the way."

Sparks added that efforts are under way to get Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison to come to a community celebration.

After Sparks' presentation, the court agreed to renew a five-year contract with the Texas State Attorney General's office. The contract allows the AG's Office to lease 5,680 square feet of space for a local office for \$5,680 per month.

The agreement will take effect July 1, 2006, and continue through June 30, 2011, according to county records.

The court also agreed to approve the county's 2005 Tax Roll, as well as issue a statement supporting Gov. Rick Perry's proclaiming next month as the official Home Care and Hospice Month.

Commissioners also further agreed to cancel the AG's Office's current annual maintenance grant contract for the fiscal year 2006 Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) Program in favor of a new contract, which will carry through to Feb. 28, 2006, rather than to Aug. 31.

Carlow said the change will allow the AG's VINE program some extra time to find a new vendor since the current vendor's contract expires Dec. 29.

The state assures the county that it will honor all obligations to maintain the program's service after March 1, 2006.

In other business, the commissioners agreed to postpone action on selling semi-tractors for precincts 3 and 4. They also agreed to table action on bids submitted by companies seeking to buy a semi-tractor from Precinct 3 and bids submitted to buy three semi-tractors from Precinct 4.

U.S. Fights Ruling For Willow Grove

A judge barred deactivation of a unit there. The Pentagon still plans to remove the A-10 attack jets.

Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA)

Marc Schogol

October 26, 2005

The Pentagon has appealed a federal judge's decision barring deactivation of a Pennsylvania Air National Guard unit that's a key to state efforts to save the Willow Grove air base.

A spokesman for Gov. Rendell said yesterday that the state would "vigorously" fight the appeal, filed Monday in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Philadelphia.

The 111th Fighter Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard was on a nationwide list of units to be deactivated that the Pentagon submitted to the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) in May.

Rendell and U.S. Sens. Rick Santorum and Arlen Specter sued, saying Guard units could not be deactivated without state consent. U.S. District Judge John R. Padova ruled in the state's favor in August.

Hours later, the BRAC approved recommendations transferring Naval and Marine Corps Reserve units at Willow Grove, but did not vote on disbanding the 111th.

It did, however, vote to strip the unit of its A-10 attack planes.

Since then, state officials have sought an agreement with Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to allow the 111th to keep those planes. Without the aircraft, it is unclear what mission the 111th would have.

Rendell spokeswoman Kate Philips said the Pentagon appeal "doesn't necessarily mean they're not willing to continue discussions with us... . It remains to be seen."

U.S. Army's base realignment plan could mean Fort McCoy loses one project but gains another

The Daily Reporter (Milwaukee, WI)

Sean Ryan

October 25, 2005

The U.S. Army's base realignment plan could mean Fort McCoy is losing one construction project but gaining another.

The Army Corps of Engineers originally planned to build a \$10 million to \$13 million Noncommissioned Officer, Academy on the Monroe County army base and put it out for bids on Oct. 3. The plan calls for a 52,000-square-foot training and barracks building, an academy headquarters building and an outdoor concrete drill pad. The project was put on hold last week because of the proposed Base Realignment and Closure plan that was released in September.

"It was on the hit list," said Jenni-fer Anderson, contract specialist in the Army Corps Louisville District Office in Kentucky.

The BRAC plan proposes moving the 84th Army Reserve Readiness Training Center from Fort McCoy to Fort Knox, Ky., in 2010. Since the NCO Academy would be built to serve the 84th, the unit could take the project along if it moves to Kentucky.

The Army Corps of Engineers cancelled the request for bids for the project last week and will rebid it in January, said Linda Fournier, Fort McCoy public affairs officer. The corps is

expecting to have an official decision about the location of the project by then, she said.

Different project possible

While the BRAC plan would take away one project, it might also give Fort McCoy a different one, Fournier said. The realignment plan proposes establishing the Northwest Regional Readiness Sustainment Command unit in Fort McCoy.

"They are projecting a construction project to go with that," she said.

The BRAC plan said that, if Fort McCoy hosts the new command unit, it would need to build a new, \$19 million headquarters for it. The size of the project is tentative until the Army figures out what shape the new Regional Readiness Sustainment Commands would take. The new command unit is part of the BRAC plan's nationwide push to consolidate 10 Army Reserve Regional Readiness Commands into four Regional Readiness Sustainment Commands. Early estimates say that Fort McCoy would take on 300 or 400 new people if the unit were based there.

"They haven't figured out what the new organization would look like," Fournier said.

It seems like the BRAC plan would be a wash for Fort McCoy in terms of full-time positions, Fournier said.

President George Bush endorsed the BRAC plan in mid-September and sent it to Congress, and it will become law on Halloween if Congress doesn't vote on it before then. It is expected to pass.

Before BRAC, many thought Fort Bliss was headed for oblivion

Bliss has turned around in 10 years

El Paso Times (El Paso, TX)

Chris Roberts

October 26, 2005

Although Fort Bliss now faces the possibility of unprecedented growth, when it lost the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in 1995 during a previous base realignment and closure round, it appeared the post was headed for oblivion.

"El Paso was kind of asleep at the wheel as far as the (loss of the 3rd Cavalry) at Fort Bliss," said retired Maj. Gen. John "Jack" Costello, who took command of the post in late 1995. "It appeared to me that caught everybody by surprise and it shouldn't have."

The feds in Washington, D.C., had misperceptions about the post, including the lack of water and maneuvering space and environmental restrictions on the training ranges, Costello said.

Another issue, that is familiar even now, was the quality of education.

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Costello said the Army had a lot of concerns and misperceptions about Fort Bliss at the time. And he said soldiers and civilians in El Paso lived in separate worlds.

"It was just an eye-opener," said Gus Rodriguez Jr., chairman of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce's Armed Forces Committee. "We always felt that Fort Bliss would be around. We didn't think that anyone would touch it."

According to retired Col. Jeff Gault, who was the post's garrison commander at the time, "Fort Bliss barely escaped by the skin of its teeth from being closed." He said Fort Bliss lost about 4,000 soldiers and more than 6,000 family

members when the 3rd Cavalry went to Fort Carson in Colorado.

"The Army and the Department of Defense were not supporting the continuation of Fort Bliss," Costello said.

Ten years later, Fort Bliss stands to gain nearly 21,000 soldiers if Congress allows the current Base Realignment and Closure proposal to become law. If lawmakers don't pass a joint resolution throwing the entire proposal out, it will become final in the next few weeks. And this time around, Fort Bliss had the highest military value of any post in the nation.

However, a decade ago, Washington officials had misperceptions, including a belief that the region was running out of drinking water, that there was a lack of maneuvering space, that training ranges were encumbered with environmental restrictions, and that the post had a deteriorating infrastructure, Costello said.

Rodriguez said that when Costello called business leaders to explain the situation, "he was very candid. You didn't have to read between the lines."

The loss of the 3rd Cavalry had immediate impacts that didn't bode well for the future.

"I saw this big hunk of soldiers leaving," Costello said. "Now, when that happens, you get your resources cut."

He said commissary hours were cut, the number of doctors at Beaumont Army Medical Center was cut, and the money spent at the post exchange declined, which funded morale, welfare and recreation activities.

Costello's immediate reaction was to find another mission for Fort Bliss. He argued that the Air Defense Artillery -- which already had a Patriot unit and the Air Defense Artillery Center and School at the post -- should be consolidated here.

"The Army didn't want to move them all into one place," he said. "I fought for about a half year until I was told to shut up."

Gault, who later became the general's chief of staff, said, "He was pretty much the squeaky wheel, the lone voice in the wind."

U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-El Paso, inherited the problem after he was elected in 1996.

"It wasn't a very good feeling, or comforting, that my military base was in danger of being realigned or eliminated," Reyes said. "There was a perception out there, which included the Department of Defense, that we were running out of water in this community and it would make sense to close the base."

Reyes quickly secured a spot on the House Armed Services Committee and started building regional alliances, including with New Mexico Republicans, who were watching White Sands Missile Range and Holloman Air Force Base.

After Costello's persistence and a hue and cry from city officials and the congressional delegation, the Army decided to create another Patriot unit at Fort Bliss and, ultimately, to move all ADA brigades to the post, creating a "center of excellence."

"That upped the population of the post so we could keep the lights turned on," Costello said. "After that, I thought it was time to devise a strategy to enhance the ADA and make Fort Bliss BRAC-proof."

As late as 1999, however, the Army still wasn't convinced of the value of the post. Army officials were "ambivalent" about renewing a lease for about 700,000 of the 1.1 million acres that mostly are used as training ranges, Gault said.

It took a full-blown environmental impact statement, a water-table survey, a Bureau of Land Management analysis of grazing permits, public hearings and more before another 25-year lease was secured, Gault said.

"It ensured the future -- that we would have the largest training installation in the Army," Gault said. "We had to work really hard to sell that message to the Army."

Reyes and others in the Texas congressional delegation also began working to get money to improve the post. That included about \$280 million spent on projects that included building a departure terminal for deployments, extending the runway and building a loading area that could handle explosives at Biggs Army Airfield, creating a railhead that allowed an increased traffic volume, and renovating and constructing housing.

The post is now considered a major "power projection" facility for troop deployments.

"This was the strategy, that every year we would be checking off those projects," Reyes said. "I don't think there was a single project on that multiyear effort that we didn't deliver on."

On the military side, Costello said he initiated a two-pronged attack. First was to get soldiers involved in the community, and particularly with the schools. Second was to convince the Army that its perceptions of Fort Bliss were wrong.

"We reopened new bridges to El Paso so that every colonel at Fort Bliss was asked to find some opportunity in El Paso -- join the opera association, the symphony, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts -- where we could help enrich the community," he said.

When it came to Army misperceptions, Costello said, he asked his staff to work up a true or false list to clearly explain Fort Bliss' potential. Army and Defense Department officials were invited to the post to take aerial tours.

Costello was supposed to leave Fort Bliss in 1997 after a two-year tour. "I told the general at (Army Training and Doctrine Command) that I'd like to stay at Fort Bliss for another year," he said, "that I would like to create some irreversible movement."

Costello said the commanders who have guided the post since he left shared the same vision and, with a strong effort from community leaders, managed to change the course of history so that the post now is being considered for other missions, including a role in the Army's multibillion-dollar Future Combat Systems development.

"In all the time I've lived in El Paso, I've never seen anything click so well," Rodriguez said.

City Council delays vote on Oceana restrictions

The Virginian-Pilot (Hampton Roads, VA)

Jon W. Glass

October 26, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH — A divided City Council agreed Tuesday to wait another month before voting on plans to restrict the development of homes and hotels in jet-noise zones around Oceana Naval Air Station.

The 7-4 vote to defer action until Nov. 22 came after hearing from more than two dozen residents and business leaders and Oceana's commanding officer.

The majority of the speakers, including developers and resort hotel owners, urged the council to collect more information before voting on restrictions that some feared would cripple the city's future economic growth.

Other business executives, including representatives of the Beach's Chamber of Commerce, said delaying the vote would send the wrong message to the Navy. They argued that the city cannot risk losing Oceana, the Beach's largest employer and an economic engine.

Several council members who supported the delay said they favor the fighter jets' staying at Oceana. But they said they want to await an economic analysis, due in early November, on the costs and benefits of keeping or losing the jets.

Council members also said they want input from a citizens' committee recently appointed to study conditions for keeping the jets imposed by the federal Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The most controversial BRAC condition would require the city and the state to condemn and buy homes in high-risk accident-potential zones around the base.

Vice Mayor Louis R. Jones said voting Tuesday would "be bypassing the process we have set up to make an intelligent decision. I don't think that sends a very good signal to anybody."

Property owners who would lose their homes under the BRAC demands showed up wearing T-shirts bearing the message "Save Our Homes."

Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf reassured the residents that the council would not condemn their homes. "We will fight as long as we can to make sure your homes are not taken away from you," she said.

Last week's decision by Jacksonville, Fla., to halt its pursuit of Oceana's jets has raised questions about whether Virginia Beach has to comply with BRAC's demands.

The BRAC ruling depended on the jets' moving to the Navy's former Cecil Field west of Jacksonville if Virginia Beach failed to comply.

The proposed development restrictions grew out of a regional land-use study launched in summer 2004 and endorsed by the council in May.

Since then, however, the BRAC Commission mandated the development restrictions as one of its conditions, a move that began raising questions in the Beach business community.

The rules would render hotels as an incompatible use along a section of the Oceanfront from 33rd to 39th streets, a prospect that one speaker likened to Las Vegas saying casinos are incompatible.

But other business operators said Oceana is too important to lose.

"I think it comes down to a matter of saving jobs," said Ramon W. Breeden Jr., the city's leading owner of apartment buildings and shopping centers.

Capt. Patrick J. Lorge, Oceana's new commanding officer, called the restrictions an attempt "to ensure the long-term strategic viability" of the base.

Voting against the delay were Oberndorf, and council members Bob Dyer, Rosemary Wilson and Jim Wood.

The restrictions would be part of an overlay district encompassing jet-noise zones that average 70 decibels or louder, covering about 30,000 acres of land, including much of the resort.

The Navy views homes and hotels in those noise zones as incompatible with Oceana's mission.

The new rules would not stop property owners from building homes or hotels on land already zoned to allow them.

However, the City Council would have to deny rezonings or use permits for those uses unless the property owner could convince the city there were no other "reasonable" uses of the land that the Navy views as compatible.

The Navy views industrial, manufacturing and retail shops as acceptable uses in the higher jet-noise zones, but those uses probably would not be suitable on parcels surrounded by residential neighborhoods, city officials have said.

Opinions/ Editorials

N/A

Additional Notes

N/A