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Editorial: Concord can do better than Seeno for weapons station deal

For Bay Area's largest housing development, City Council should start the developer selection process over again



(Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)

Developer Albert Seeno III walks outside the Federal Courthouse after pleading guilty to bank fraud on behalf of his home sales company, Discovery Sales, in Oakland, Calif., on Thursday, Dec. 8, 2016. Seeno was ordered to pay \$11 million as part of a mortgage scam to boost the sales of Seeno homes in 2006-2008. (Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)



By **EAST BAY TIMES EDITORIAL** |

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The Concord City Council should halt the current negotiations over the Bay Area's largest housing project, at the Naval Weapons Station site, and select a new master developer.

Clearly, the Concord First Partners consortium is not prepared to meet the terms of its original deal. The only ethical option for the council is to reopen the bidding — again.

We watched a [politically corrupted](#) process that resulted in 2016 with the selection of the first developer. But that company, Lennar Urban, bailed because it said the council-imposed labor requirements made the project financially infeasible.

New bidding in 2021 ended when Concord First Partners, which includes Albert D. Seeno III's Discovery Builders, was selected for exclusive negotiations over two prominent development firms after saying it could meet the labor demands.

Now the consortium says it cannot meet those conditions unless the city agrees to increase the number of housing units on the 2,275-acre site from 12,272 to 16,474, a 34% increase. That wasn't the deal.

That wasn't an option for Lennar or the other key firm it competed against in the first round. That wasn't an option for the competing developers in 2021. [Bidding requirements](#) specifically called for "up to 12,200 housing units."

If the council wants to increase the number of units, that's a legitimate policy option to consider. But there should be a level playing field. All the bidders should have had that option. The city should not change the rules for Concord First Partners only after its competitors have been eliminated.

With a fair and level playing field, surely the city can do better than Concord First Partners. Surely the city can do better than Seeno III, who in 2016 [pleaded guilty](#) to bank fraud on behalf of his home sales company, Discovery Sales.

Seeno III's father, prominent developer Albert Seeno Jr., is suing his son trying to oust him as CEO of five of the father's firms. The litigation, [detailed on this editorial page on Thursday](#), contains troubling allegations about Seeno III's management, debt to and deception of his own father, and treatment of employees.



Seeno III's insistence that his father can't fire him because of an airtight employment agreement, and the voluminous litigation that has resulted, should signal to Concord officials that striking a 40-year development deal with him and his partners could be a recipe for legal heartache.

Making matters worse, the proposed deal would give Concord First Partners the rights to the entirety of the massive project. That's ridiculous. It should have to prove itself through its actions. The last deal, the one with Lennar, would have only entitled the company to build the first phase of the project. After that, the city was to evaluate how it was going before deciding whether to continue. That's as it should be.

The good news is that it's not too late. The city isn't stuck with Seeno III and the rest of the Concord First Partners consortium. If the consortium can't make the deal work as it originally agreed to, the city is free to walk away and start the process over. That's what it should do.

The City Council will hold a special meeting at 9 a.m. Saturday to decide whether to continue negotiating with Concord First Partners. The meeting, which had originally been slated to be held in a larger venue, has been changed to the City Council chambers to allow residents to participate remotely [by Zoom](#).

In the November elections, in the only two competitive City Council races, Concord residents signaled what they apparently want. Voters in District 1 reelected Laura Hoffmeister, who opposed the 2021 selection of Concord First Partners. And in District 5, voters ousted incumbent Tim McGallian, a supporter of the consortium, and replaced him with Laura Nakamura, a critic.

The consortium previously had only [3-2 support](#) on the five-member council. It seems that it now only has two votes of support, at best. Residents will see this weekend whether the council will do the right thing: Kill the deal and start over.

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