

## **El Cerrito council denounces county jail expansion in Richmond**

El Cerrito last week joined Richmond in formally opposing the planned expansion of the West Contra Costa Detention Facility.



Aerial shot of the West County Detention Facility.

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**EL CERRITO** — The city last week joined Richmond in formally opposing the planned expansion of the West Contra Costa Detention Facility.

The City Council on April 4 unanimously approved a recommendation by Councilwoman Rochelle Pardue–Okimoto “authorizing the mayor to send a letter to the California Board of State and Community Corrections opposing the \$70 million grant proposal from the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Office for the expansion of the West County Detention Facility in Richmond.”

County supervisors in February voted 4-1 in favor of moving ahead with the project, with Supervisor John Gioia of West County casting the dissenting vote.

Gioia spoke at the El Cerrito council meeting before the vote on the letter, saying that “The proposal is much bigger than it needs to be,” and will be costly to the county, which must come up with \$22 million for its share of the expansion cost, as well as \$5 million from undetermined sources for annual operating costs.

Gioia argued that any new facility should place a greater emphasis on mental health beds.

Gioia and Maria Alegria, chairwoman of the Democratic Party of Contra Costa, also expressed concerns that the added capacity would be used to house additional immigration detainees of the federal ICE enforcement program.

Numerous community members also spoke against the project at the council meeting.

“The Sheriff’s Office states there is a need for the expansion due to the overcrowding at the Martinez jail, which is currently housing significantly more inmates than recommended,” according to the city staff report accompanying last week’s agenda item. “The plan proposes to add a new wing to the Richmond facility that is close to 120,000 square feet, including space for 400 beds and child-visitation, re-entry and rehabilitation centers.”

The Richmond City Council went on record opposing the expansion in 2015.