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Officials fret over eBART parking

By Sarah Jane Tribble

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Plans for eBART commuter train stations in East County are still in the early stages, but Antioch's city leaders are already bristling.

They fear too much of the city's prime land will become a parking lot.

"I'm willing to compromise and negotiate, but I'm not willing to have the entire parking in Antioch," City Councilman James Conley said. "I think the BART district can put a little more pressure on our partners to really make this thing work."

At issue are plans to create parking lots on property Antioch city leaders say could be home to needed businesses and jobs for residents. The roughly \$400 million Bay Area Rapid Transit extension known as eBART proposes diesel-powered trains running from the Pittsburg-Bay Point station to Antioch, Oakley, Brentwood and Byron. Service is expected to begin in 2010.

Three of the six stations being planned as part of the 23-mile extension would use land in Antioch city limits. Proposed station sites include the Antioch fairgrounds and Hillcrest Avenue.

The latest proposed station would be at the intersection of Empire Avenue and a reconfigured Neroly Road. The station site would be shared by Antioch and Oakley.

The site plan calls for more than 8 acres of parking in Antioch and about 10 acres in Oakley, according to maps provided by BART consultants. The plan also calls for 10 to 15 acres of houses in bordering Brentwood to meet housing requirements for federal funds, according to the consultants.

Earlier this year, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission approved a policy requiring communities in the nine-county Bay Area to develop an average of at least 2,200 apartments or single-family homes within a half-mile radius of each proposed station before the agency will give them federal funds.

Devi Lanphere, president and chief executive officer of the Antioch Chamber of Commerce, said she fears that regional transportation planners view East County only as a place for rooftops and not potential jobs.

"BART needs to do real outreach for a very angry and disillusioned community," she said.

Mayor Donald Freitas said he is also concerned with the road access to the site. Neroly Road may be too narrow to accommodate a commuter station, he said.

"It does alarm me," Freitas said.

BART consultants called the proposed site plan a "best guess" as to exactly where the station would go. The agency plans to have public hearings on draft plans for the extension project late next year.