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By Tanya Rose
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After months of discussion, city leaders on Wednesday chose a piece of land at Walnut Boulevard and Central Boulevard in Brentwood for a future eBART station, deciding to forgo other far-flung, non-downtown alternatives. Councilmembers said it was the most logical place for a mass-transit station; the spot is centrally located and is within walking distance of City Hall, the post office and other downtown mainstays.

Also, the city owns part of the land, and BART owns the other part, taking away the need for any eminent domain action. In fact, the Tri-Delta Transit bus system already operates there and an eBART station, officials said, would simply be a continuation of that history.

It's not set in stone, however; the decision was made, basically, so that BART officials know where to focus their intense environmental and ridership studies, they said. Those will be conducted over the next 12 to 18 months, said Ellen Smith, eBART project manager. "The (Walnut and Central) location is more compressed than the others, but at the same time, it's close to downtown and that's an advantage," Smith said.

Other alternatives included a downtown site at Oak Street and Brentwood Boulevard and a site off O'Hara Avenue, south of Sand Creek Road. The O'Hara spot contained more room for parking spaces -- something commuters would surely use -- but council members said they didn't like the actual site location. And the other downtown spot would have been awkward for buses to get in and out of, they said.

Ultimately, the plan is to link BART with East County, something residents have been ready for since 1958, when they began paying property taxes for an extension. The Brentwood Community Center was packed Wednesday night as people listened to the alternatives, looking at colorful maps of the 23-mile East County system. The \$377 million, diesel-powered train system would run on existing tracks between BART's existing Pittsburg/Bay Point station and the town of Byron. Trains, which would go 75 mph or faster, would stop at up to seven stations in between -- in Pittsburg, Antioch, Oakley, Brentwood and then Byron. BART officials say the train could be up and running by 2010, bringing relief to the merciless gridlock on Highway 4.

Earlier in the week, Oakley officials also cast their decision on one of the stations -- they picked a spot at Neroly Road and Empire Avenue, which is on the Antioch-Oakley

border. Eventually, Neroly could be realigned to accommodate the station, and Slatten Ranch

Road could be extended to lead to better access. That site can accommodate up to 1,100 parking spaces and will rest just beyond major shopping centers in the area. Brentwood Councilman Bob Brockman predicted that many Brentwood residents would use that station -- maybe even more than would use the downtown Brentwood station. Once the project is further along, the idea is to attract riders by building high-density housing near the stations.

Brentwood council members approved the Walnut-Central station with a vote of 4-0, with Mayor Brian Swisher absent. For more information about the eBART project, visit ebartproject.org.

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