Finding New Ways to Build Stronger Levees

By Federal Glover

The package of bills that would have added more protection for homeowners and communities in the Delta's flood plains or behind levees died in the latest State Legislative Session.

Assembly member Lois Wolk, D-Davis, the author of AB 1665, reluctantly allowed the bill to die in committee, Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, which she chairs.

AB1665, would have required subdivisions of 25 or more units to have a levee of 100-year flood protection. That is, it could survive a storm of a magnitude that is likely to occur in a 100 year period.

Despite the bill's failure, the new developments in East County will not have to worry because the new levees they have surrounding their neighborhoods are built with 300-year flood protection.

However, the rest of the county's levees are substandard. Except for the levees around Discovery Bay, most were built almost a century ago.

While backers of Wolk's legislation failed to build a consensus for new flood control policies, there is a strong agreement about what to do to protect home and land owners in the part of the Delta around Oakley.

Home builders worked with city, county and reclamation district officials on a plan to build strong new levees that meet tough safety standards before new homes are built. Known as the East Cypress Corridor Specific Plan, it allows home builders to construct new homes, provided that these homes and some existing ones that are in the area are protected from flooding. The builders have agreed to construct, entirely at their cost, an 8.1-mile-long levee system that will be the safest in the Delta. More than 500 existing homes will receive new flood protection and no new homes can be occupied before the \$25 million levee system is completed.

No state or federal taxpayer funds will be needed – the developers will pay the full cost of the new levees, pumps and evacuation routes. Most importantly, the new levees will be designed to meet the 300-year flood standard. These means they will be engineered to withstand a flood that is likely to occur on once in three centuries.

Federal standards, and Wolk's legislation, was based on a 100-year standard, so the new Oakley levees will be among the safest in the Delta.

In addition, the Specific Plan includes 396 acres of lakes and wetlands, 295 acres of parks and open space, easements for a trail system and it enables a 1,200 acre marine ecology state restoration project to get underway. The builders also have agreed to support an Eastern Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan devised by environmental groups and government agencies to protect native species and wetlands.

Good development in the Delta comes from good planning and the cooperation of home builders and safety engineers and governmental agencies with oversight by the latter. While final action by several key public agencies is required, I am encouraged by the precedent set by this cooperation between private and public sectors in order to protect the environment.

We need homes and we need to protect the environment. This project does both. VOTING MATTERS

This Nov. 7, voters will get a chance to exercise one of their most important rights. Voters will get a chance to decide on everything from a governor down to the local issues and offices in East County.

Among the issues we will vote on is Measure L, the Urban Limit Line measure that I have supported since I took office in 2000. A Yes vote will put the growth boundary in place until 2026.

Equally important are all the school board and city council offices that will be filled by your neighbors. These offices often have the most immediate impact on your quality of life, so be discerning who you pick.

The important thing is to get out and make your voice heard. Voting matters. (Federal Glover is the County Supervisor of District 5)