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Compromise in the works

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Last Sunday, EPA officials presented the public with their first compromise on CDFs for the New Bedford Harbor Superfund project.

Originally they planned to fill the Coffin Avenue lagoon with 270,000 cubic yards of dredged sediments from the harbor, but when they heard some residents' concerns they decided to hold a meeting in the neighborhood to talk to people who live closest to the location.

Since filling the whole cove is unworkable, we're trying to keep our options open," said EPA project manager David Dickerson.

Dickerson and Frank Clavattieri, also of the EPA, said they're looking at filling in the southern half of the cove to keep the waterway clear. The remaining half of the sediments could be stored in smaller CDFs

along the west shore of the river from Wood Street to Coggeshall Street.

"Some of the old mill buildings' (owners) indicated they would be very interested in having CDFs behind the buildings on the banks of the river," Dickerson said. "It excited us because it's a rare chance to make a park there."

The CDFs would be covered by several layers of liners and soils and trees and grass could be planted in the topsoil.

Dickerson said the alternative would take some of the burden off Coffin Avenue residents while enhancing the city's waterfront.

Jim Simmons, president of Hands Across the River Coalition (HARC), was also in favor of the option.

"The area near Sawyer Street and the Coggeshall Street Bridge is not residential. No one lives there," he said. "The whole area would be enhanced because it would be a recreational facility rather than a hazardous waste facility."

He said HARC still wants the EPA to look into bioremediation as a way of destroying the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) once and for all.

"Bioremediation is very cost effective, it's not expensive at all," he said. "If we can find a company to test it for free, we can prove to the EPA it can be done."

The next New Bedford Harbor Superfund Forum meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 28, at 6 p.m. in New Bedford Vocational Technical High School.