

Developers say growth can be good for San Joaquin County

Lodi News-Sentinel

By Ripley Howe, staff writer

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Should Stockton's northern march continue, the area's two biggest developers, Alex Spanos and Fritz Grupe, are expected to help lead it.

Stockton's A.G. Spanos Co. and the Grupe Co. claim they have no immediate plans for any development north of Eight Mile Road. But a look at the developments to the south show steady residential, commercial and light industrial development extending from Stockton northward.

Regional planned growth, with integrated parks, lakes and golf courses, is the best plan for the future of the San Joaquin Valley, and is preferable to scattered development that lacks open areas, the developers say.

It's not up to them to create greenbelts or to preserve open space between communities -- if property owners want to sell, if local governments approve, and the whole deal makes financial sense, then they will develop it, the developers say.

"That's how development deals are made," said Spanos spokesman Dean Plassaras of P&A Consulting.

Ultimately, decisions about open space and undeveloped community dividers are in the hands of citizens and politicians, not developers, he said.

The key is how the land is ultimately developed -- in large "master planned" communities with water features, schools and shopping centers, or in smaller developments like the walled-in communities appearing on the fringes of Lodi, Plassaras said.

Environmentalists disagree.

"That's like debating whether to go to hell in a limousine or a Chevrolet," said Eric Parfrey, head of the San Joaquin Chapter of the Sierra Club. "The main issue we're dealing with here is the perception that Lodi, Stockton and all the cities in the San Joaquin Valley will continue to grow outward at low densities for ever and ever."

Citizens need to fight that perception because that sort of low-density sprawl leads to longer commutes, housing-jobs imbalances, overcrowded schools and [deteriorating air quality](#).

"It means a worse and worse quality of life for everyone who moved out here

because they thought there was something here for them, he said.

"Developers are remarkably flexible," Parfrey said.

Developers prefer to use open green areas because they are easier and less expensive to develop -- but when that land is not available, they will turn their skills to projects inside the city.

Parfrey suggests cities purchase land from farmers, take the development rights for the properties and sell them back to the farmers. This will eliminate the pressure on the farms to sell the land to developers, he said.

Forming a 'committee of wise men'

One area of agreement is that first there should be open communication between the area's local governments, property owners and developers.

Spanos spokesman Plassaras suggested Lodi and Stockton form "a committee of wise men" to examine the idea of a separator between the two cities.

"The best minds in the community need to address these issues," he said. "It amazes me that there is not an active dialogue between the two cities."

Some type of buffer zone between the two cities is in order, he said -- though a community separator does not need to be a linear band of undeveloped or agricultural land. It could be a "meandering line" that includes large parks, lakes, bike trails and outdoor sports complexes.

But even city and regional governments may not be able to control the influx of people coming from the Bay Area, seeking lower housing prices and relief from traffic and congestion.

"There are much larger forces that are directing the future of the Central Valley," Plassaras said. "Development of some sort is a fact of life, but it does not have to be ugly or oppressive."

The housing pressure is largely coming from the Bay Area, said Kevin Huber, Grupe Co.'s president. The average price for a new house in the Bay Area is around \$400,000 and in some areas it is \$600,000, Huber said -- while in Stockton, it's closer to \$280,000. The lower prices are like a magnet, drawing people to the San Joaquin Valley.

Huber said he doesn't think the costs of the creation of a community separator should be paid for by development companies.

Developers should pay for increased costs to communities caused by

development, such as increased fire and police protection, and increased water and sewer demand, Huber said.

But if communities want to maintain open space boundaries between communities, the developers should not be forced to pay for it, he said.

Local developer Jeff Kirst said he has only local infill projects planned for the next two years, and therefore could not talk about plans outside of the current city limits.

However, if people want a separator, the communities will have to work together to create it.

"You will have to get the city of Stockton, the county and the developers in the area to cooperate," he said. "Lodi has a growth management plan, and we work within it, and it's working very well," he said.

To preserve a boundary between the two cities, Kirst proposed a zoning rule limiting residential parcels to a five-acre minimum.

"That would give you lots of open space, but the density would be low," he said. "Some of the farmers didn't care for that because higher density (development) is their retirement," he said.

Lodi's general plan, last updated in 1991, calls for a maximum population growth of 2 percent a year.

Lodi's policy a hindrance?

Grube's Huber said Lodi's slow-growth policies may actually be contributing to the problems of creating an open-space barrier between the two cities.

Lodi's "phased growth" development means that relatively small areas become available for development at one time -- and this has resulted in the smaller, more anonymous sort of developments typical of Lodi's development over the last decade.

He said much of the property between Lodi and Stockton is held by property-owners holding relatively small pieces of property -- and when smaller properties are developed, it is not financially feasible to build in the golf courses, lakes, parks and trails that contribute to the feeling of open space in a developed area.

But when larger areas become available at one time, developers can negotiate with the landowners to create master planned communities with their attendant amenities.

Also, because these are such high-profile projects, they get more public scrutiny than smaller, walled-in cookie cutter developments, he said.

The problem, Plassaras said, is to avoid what he called "indistinguishable development."

The effects of good or bad planning will endure long past any of our lifetimes, Plassaras said. Once a house is built on a lot, or a shopping center covers a piece of agricultural land, it is likely to stay that way forever.

"Fifty years from now no one will remember our names," he said. "But in the future, people will either say 'These people did it right,' or they will subject us to eternal damnation."

City Council's agenda packed with projects tonight

The Bakersfield Californian

By James Burger, staff writer

December 10, 2003

Section: Local Page: B5

Bakersfield City Council members will consider supporting a downtown stream project tonight. They will also look at plans that could lead to development of one of the city's most visible corners. The council also could act on two proposed housing projects opposed by the Sierra Club and start the process to annex a northwest neighborhood.

All five issues will be taken up by the council at 7 p.m. tonight at City Hall, 1501 Truxtun Ave.

The last item on the agenda is a public hearing on the Mill Creek Project.

It is a city plan to convert the rough, fenced-off embankment along the Kern Island Canal downtown into a meandering park with public art, benches and a small lake.

Tonight the council will consider certifying that the project will not have an environmental impact. And it will also talk about applying for a \$3 million state grant that would be used to get the project started.

An agreement with the Kern Delta Water District, which owns the canal, will also be on the agenda.

The project would run from Golden State Avenue south through Central Park to California Avenue.

It would cost the city around \$10 million and would be completed in stages using redevelopment taxes, federal economic development money, bike path cash, park development fees and other grants.

There is some opposition to the project from Dave Cross, who owns land along the canal between California and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad.

The council will also consider a plan to break a famous Bakersfield corner into parcels for small office buildings.

The land at the corner of Oak and 24th streets currently holds a huge Christmas tree lot.

Eventually, however, the city of Bakersfield hopes to buy the land and use it to construct a major interchange between the two roads.

The spot is one of the most congested intersections in the city.

But city of Bakersfield officials are not yet ready to buy the land and owners Tom Carosella and John Sarad have said they need to prepare it for commercial use.

Members of the Bakersfield Planning Commission split their vote on the topic over concerns that developing the property might make traffic worse in surrounding neighborhoods.

The council will also consider two projects that have been opposed by the local chapter of the Sierra Club.

One project is located on the south side of Paladino Drive west of Morning Drive. It would include lots for 173 single family homes.

The other project is planned on the west side of Old Farm Road between Reina Road and Noriega Road and is planned for 326 homes.

The Sierra Club has opposed various projects around Bakersfield over the past several months. Sierra Club leaders argue that new home development makes traffic congestion and air pollution worse.

The council will also hold a public hearing to find out what people think about a plan to annex a neighborhood west of Allen Road and north of Palm Avenue into the city.

The city has been reluctant to annex existing neighborhoods, like this one, since it was sued over the simultaneous annexation of neighborhoods in the Palm and Olive areas several years ago.

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Local business looks to the future

The Bakersfield Californian

By Gretchen Wenner, staff writer

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Section: Business Page: C1

Here's a statement you don't necessarily expect to hear at a business forecast luncheon: "We live in an area such that we are never going to have pristine air. If you remove every person, industry, business, truck and drain, this valley will not meet federal air quality standards. It cannot be done."

Those words, spoken by state Sen. Roy Ashburn during a question-and-answer period, were some of the edgiest voiced at an annual lunch event put on by the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce.

The event, called "Bakersfield: The Next Five Years," drew about 160 people to the Holiday Inn Select.

Ashburn, a Republican from Bakersfield, spoke about government issues facing Kern County.

He opened with a sly joke that spread laughter among the munching audience.

"I'm from the government," Ashburn said. "I'm here to help."

Kern County will face growth challenges because of its affordability, he said. That will mean thorny planning and funding issues involving new schools, road, water sources and other necessities.

Ashburn slammed lengthy environmental impact paperwork that requires years of negotiations about "insects, rodents and weeds" before highway safety and other issues are addressed.

He was one of the few speakers to make formal "predictions" at the forecast event. He pinpointed three items: Military base closures in Kern County would have a profound negative effect on Bakersfield's business climate; a vaccine for valley fever will be found; and local residents will be seeing Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger a great deal.

"He likes Bakersfield," said Ashburn, who has reportedly become part of the new governor's inner circle.

Local developer and convenience store mogul Lee Jamieson said Bakersfield's economy will stay strong because of the amount of construction going on here. Jamieson, the developer behind the Northwest Promenade and other projects, said locals are used to a "boom and bust" cycle. Some think a downturn is inevitable because of the recent gain in home values. But, he said, this time will be different.

That's because the construction boom creating some 4,000 new homes this year is creating a skilled labor force, he said. That will create small businesses and growth even if the building pace subsides.

However, Jamieson added, the state's high workers' compensation rates, electricity prices and other costs could keep outside firms away.

Other speakers included Shannon Smith of Continental Labor Resources Inc., James George Jr. of Cal State Bakersfield and Louis Gill Jr. of the Bakersfield Homeless Center.

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[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Dec. 10, 2003:](#)

Losing credibility

Ever since the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced that it would soon be restricting our freedom to enjoy ourselves by a nice warm fireplace or wood stove, I have been watching the Air Quality Index report in The Californian. What I have noticed is that the daily prediction is usually higher than the actual level that is reported the following day.

Sure enough, on the day of our very first wood-burning ban, The Californian reported a predicted level of 154, well into the unhealthy range. And what was the actual recorded number reported the following day? A moderate 74.

I question whether these predictions are based on actual pseudoscience or are the environmentalists simply holding a wet finger in the wind to see how much interference in his personal life the average citizen is willing to put up with?

I do have a suggestion for The Californian. Perhaps you should stop reporting the previous day's actual air quality number or these folks at the SJVAPCD may begin to lose credibility.

-- Gary Kimbrell, Bakersfield

Oakland glass plant owner pleads guilty in clean air case

The Associated Press -

(Published in the Fresno Bee - Wednesday, December 10, 2003, 5:55 AM)

Oakland (AP) - The owner of an Oakland glass container plant has pleaded guilty in federal court to violating the federal Clean Air Act.

Owens-Brockway Glass Container has been ordered to pay \$98,000 for demolishing two exhaust stacks without proper notice.

The company is a subsidiary of Owens-Illinois of Toledo, Ohio.

The company admitted destroying the two 130-tall exhaust stacks in 1999 without notifying the local air quality management district.

Air Pollution Control developing new regulation to reduce dust emission from agricultural operations

Special to the Madera Tribune

Tuesday, December 09, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is developing a new rule to reduce fugitive dust emissions from agricultural field operations, livestock operations, and agricultural unpaved roads and traffic areas.

Rule 4550 (Conservation Management Practices) is being developed according to the Conservation Management Practices Program, a control strategy from the 2003 PM10 Plan approved earlier this year by the District's Governing Board. The goal of the PM10 plan is to reduce the emission of particles 10 microns and smaller, about one-seventh the width of a human hair. These particles lodge in the lungs and can cause serious health problems.

The rule applies to agricultural crop operations of 100 or more contiguous acres and to animal feeding operations above certain population thresholds.

Rule 3190 (Conservation Management Practices Plan Fee) will recover the cost related to the review, approval, and enforcement of the conservation management plans in accordance with Rule 4550.

Public workshops to discuss Rule 4550 and Rule 3190 are scheduled in each of the District's three regions:

- 10 a.m. today, Dec. 9 at the District's Fresno office (1990 E. Gettysburg Ave.);
- 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 10, at the Modesto office (4230 Kiernan Ave.); and
- 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 11, at the Bakersfield office (2700 M St., ste. 275).

The workshops will be video-conferenced among all three offices so that residents may attend and provide comments during any of the three meetings in any office.

Farmers and operators who are subject to Rule 4550 would be required to select one Conservation Management Practice (CMP) for each of several source categories and submit a CMP plan to the District for approval.

The District has worked closely with area growers to identify commodity-specific practices that are feasible for the Valley region. Examples include:

- Practices that reduce or eliminate the need to disturb the soil or manure;
- Practices that protect the soil from wind erosion;
- Practices that reduce emissions from unpaved roads and parking areas;
- Alternative practices to waste burning.

The District will hold a second round of workshops early in 2004 with rule adoption expected in April 2004. The District will begin rule implementation in July 2004.

For more information on Conservation Management Practices or the upcoming workshops, call the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno at (559) 230-6000; in Modesto at (209) 557-6400; and in Bakersfield at (661) 326-6900.