

So It Begins

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By KIRK EFFINGER

So it begins. Under the guise of protecting the people from those they elect, a group of individuals billing themselves as concerned citizens have announced a petition drive to take planning decisions out of the hands of the Board of Supervisors and the professionals who vet them and put those decisions into the hands of voters by forcing all county projects to strictly adhere to the County General Plan.

This is ballot-box planning at its worst. Ninety-nine-point ninety-nine percent of voters have virtually no knowledge or background in urban planning, and even less interest in wading through the thousands of documents these proposals are required to submit to gain approval. This understandable lack of knowledge and motivation is precisely why we have elected representatives.

Those whose knee-jerk reaction is to oppose development proposals willfully perpetuate the fiction that General Plans are sacrosanct and inviolable. This has never been the case, nor should it be. Given the market economy we live in is...and has always been...in a constant state of flux, the law recognizes the need for mechanisms to adjust to the current realities. They also would have you believe that slavishly following the General Plan will lead to the "right" developments being built in every case.

One of the biggest fantasies in their devotion to the General Plan is critics' pointing to how development is being pushed back to the cities and towns. While it may look reasonable on paper, these same locales fight increased development and densities in their backyards, just as those who cry "Save our open space!" and their fellow travelers do in the so-called "backcountry." This largely successful mindset has created the gridlock we are now experiencing.

One of the projects often cited as being "wrong," Newland Sierra, is ... under the current General Plan ... zoned to provide 99 homes in a large-lot subdivision AND up to two-million square feet of commercial/retail space. This is no doubt in recognition of the fact that the site in question lies directly adjacent to the I-15 freeway and Deer Springs interchange.

One of this development's opponents' stated goals is to preserve "open space." The Newland development proposal is to permanently preserve and maintain nearly two-thirds of its total area as open space. If the County's current plan were to be followed, a development the equivalent of two North County Fair malls, and 99 ten-acre parcels with houses could be built, leaving virtually no "open space".

The charge that developers are allowed to build "what they want, where they want" is incendiary and wrong. The proposals that reach the Board of Supervisors we elect to make these decisions, are the ones that have been vetted by scores of planning and development professionals, having gone through years ... sometimes decades ... of challenges and modifications. The public never sees the hundreds of proposals deemed unacceptable that never make it that far.

Anti-development forces have conspired to strangle the housing supply in this county ... indeed, this state...long enough that we have now reached crisis levels. It's time to stop perpetuating falsehoods and work together to solve this issue that is so critical to our citizens.

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