

## The Future of Goleta Editorial 6/30/03

The County of Santa Barbara recently hosted two workshops to present the draft of its housing element prepared in response to State mandated growth targets through 2008. In it the County has recommended rezoning from agriculture to residential uses around 135 acres in the unincorporated area of Goleta. Subsequent development would result in densities as great as 20 units per acre, buildings as tall as four stories and the construction of as many as 2,000 units. In preparing this plan the County consulted with affordable housing advocates and the development community. The residents of Goleta were neither asked nor did they have the opportunity to provide any input.

It is not surprising then that the initial public response to the plan was what one local paper described as “outrage”.

There are fundamental concerns about the housing element process being raised by large numbers of residents of this community that must not be ignored or blithely dismissed as a typical “not-in-my-back-yard” reaction. The County, in its public presentation in support of this zoning plan, stressed the need for affordable housing, the State requirement to zone for it and the dire consequences for the community if this doesn’t take place. We are told that this is for the public good but the housing element update process so far can only be characterized as being unbalanced and incomplete. Discussion of the public good requires a dialogue with the public. This has not happened. The failure to do so is evidenced by the number of residents of Goleta who are deeply skeptical of the plan and harbor great pessimism and resentment that the County will provide them a meaningful opportunity to voice their concerns.

The community understands that the State will assign more housing to this area when the housing element is updated again in 2008 but the County failed to address this issue in their public presentations. However, in a May 2003 presentation to the County Board of Supervisors the Planning Department predicted that by the year 2030 Goleta will need to convert approximately 3,000 acres of open space to housing based on current growth rates. Why is this information provided to the Board of Supervisors but not to the public at the community meetings? Doesn’t it make sense for these growth projections to be discussed in terms of their long-term significance?

It is unwise to attempt to restrict the debate about growth in Goleta to the next five year period only. Reassurances of adequate public infrastructure, protection of open spaces, mitigation of traffic congestion, water supplies and many other issues ring hollow and irresponsible when the cumulative impact of this growth is understood. It is also not clear whether any thought has been given toward the combined impact of this growth in the unincorporated area of Goleta, parallel growth in the City of Goleta and anticipated expansion at UCSB.

Make no mistake, the current trend of the State’s housing element law will result in this – Goleta will be transformed from a suburban to an urban region with high density

development, chronic traffic congestion and large scale housing in the foothills and along the coast.

The overwhelming majority of residents of the unincorporated areas of Goleta reject these outcomes. It is time for the County's Planning Department to provide the tax-payers and voters of this area some realistic and detailed analysis of the long term effects of the housing crisis and the State's requirement to address it. The County is able to calculate profit margins for developers to produce high density housing but they have been unable so far to advise the community of the cumulative costs of this building on traffic, services, parks, water, schools and finances. Important decisions need to be made. The public's collective wisdom and perspective are essential to achieving the best possible decisions.

The State of California and the County of Santa Barbara have made clear their vision of Goleta's future. It is time for both to listen to the thousands of residents of this area who deeply respect the beauty and livability of this region and are determined to seek solutions that will preserve as much of it as possible for the enjoyment of future generations.