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Take a common sense approach

When it comes to land use decisions, Monterey County government is broken.

Take Rancho San Juan, for example. After the Board of Supervisors voted in favor of Rancho San Juan, 76 percent of voters said "NO" to RSJ in last November's referendum.



**Guest
comment**

■ **Chris Fitz**

Voters said "no" to further gridlock on their roads and "no" to exhausting water supplies in an already dangerously over-drafted aquifer.

That election showed how badly county government is broken and that the radical pro-growth majority on the Board of Supervisors is completely out of touch with the voters of Monterey County.

Incredibly, the day before the election, four members of the board approved the first phase of the original Rancho San Juan proposal, and set the stage to develop the full project in a piecemeal fashion, regardless of the county-wide vote. Only Supervisor Dave Potter voted against the project.

The board's arrogant antics on RSJ are examples of a well-established pattern. While we can expect people to disagree about how much growth we should have, most people understand that the county general plan needs to identify those places where growth should happen and where it should not over the

next 20 to 25 years.

But the radical pro-growth majority on the Board of Supervisors disagrees with this common sense approach to planning. They do not want a general plan that identifies places where growth should not happen. They want a plan in which the answer to development, throughout the entire unincorporated county, is either "yes" or "maybe." They want a plan that "never says no."

The voters want growth to be responsible; they want a general plan that makes the tough decisions up front about where growth should occur and where it should not. The civic and neighborhood groups working for responsible growth exhausted every opportunity trying to get our elected officials to address their concerns and take decisive action through the general plan process.

After exhausting every opportunity, and as a last resort, the individuals and organizations working for responsible growth launched a petition drive in October to put an initiative on the June 2006 ballot, amending the current general plan so that it will require responsible growth. From the first public announcement, the proponents of the Community General Plan Initiative have included a wide array of civic groups, community leaders and elected officials, including County Supervisor Potter.

Since that time, nearly 16,000 signatures were collected in

just five weeks — months ahead of the 180 day deadline. The Elections Department counted the signatures and certified the initiative for the ballot. At the same time, activists collected signatures for a referendum to put the newly approved Rancho San Juan project back on the ballot. Both measures will be on the June ballot.

Here's what the initiative will do:

- Focus public investment (in police, fire protection and schools) in existing neighborhoods and cities by limiting subdivisions in the unincorporated County to five "community areas": Boronda, Castroville, Chualar, Fort Ord and Pajaro;

- Require that water and road capacity are in place prior to or concurrent with new development;

- Increase the amount of "below market-rate" housing set aside in each new development from 20 percent to 30 percent;

- Allow the people to vote on any exceptions to the first three policies.

The opposition likes to say that the initiative is too complex for the average voter to understand. But as with Rancho San Juan, voters have shown they have a good grasp of growth-related issues like affordable housing, traffic and water.

The opposition also likes to say this is a "no growth" plan. But over the next 20 years Monterey County will experience tremendous growth,

regardless whether the initiative passes. Here's what is coming our way throughout Monterey County (including both the cities and the unincorporated areas):

- 15,000 homes have been approved but not yet built, or are in the permitting process;

- Another 50,000 homes are in the general planning process;

- Together, these 65,000 homes will accommodate more than 200,000 new residents.

Additionally, the initiative will allow the county to meet or surpass all of the state mandated regional housing objectives by allowing for more than 6,900 homes to be built in the five community areas.

The decision makers 30 years ago in Santa Clara, L.A., and Orange Counties didn't want to pave over paradise and create a sprawling, suburban nightmare. It happened one project at a time.

The outcome of the Rancho San Juan referendum and the Community General Plan Initiative in June will have a fundamental impact on our future. A "NO" vote on Rancho San Juan and a "YES" vote on the initiative will enable Monterey County, for the next 25 years (the duration of the initiative), to grow responsibly, and thrive without becoming a sprawling suburban nightmare.

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