

11/17/09

Erika Leachman
County of Santa Barbara Planning Department
C/O Goleta Valley Planning Advisory Committee
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RE: Goleta Valley Planning Advisory Committee, Patterson Ag Properties.

Chairwoman Olson, Distinguished Committee Members and Staff Planners:

As I have observed your interaction over the past few months it is clear that you are working hard to put together a land use plan that you hope will serve the needs of the community for the next 10 to 20 years. I have some thoughts that may help you achieve the goals you are working so hard to obtain.

We own and operate Deigaard Nurseries and the property at 5295 Shoreline Drive. We are on the coastal mesa in what is being called the South Patterson Ag Property area. Our family has owned this property since 1950. We grow ornamentals in containers specializing in palms. Business has fallen off and is no longer profitable for a handful of reasons. One reason is that the nursery business centers have relocated to the 126 corridor and other places. Our customer base is no longer near us. We find ourselves in a situation similar to being an elementary school in a neighborhood where the children have all grown up and left. There are other reasons that I won't bore you with, but suffice it to say that the nursery business is no longer an attractive use for the property. It is likely that we will be making changes.

In discussions with our family and other growers over the options for the properties it makes sense to us to allow them to become a place for houses consistent with homes adjacent to and mingled within our area.

When we drive around the neighborhood we see the houses adjacent to us on the east. Austin Road dead ends at our property. There is no turn around at Austin. It takes a 5 point turn to go back the way you came. We also noticed that the only way you can see the ocean from there is from a living room of someone fortunate enough to live on the cliffs. The view is blocked by houses and fences to the rest of the neighbors and community.

As we drove around the other Ag properties to the west we found out that the entire coastal view is blocked by houses and fences except our property and the two adjacent properties to the west. They are occupied by West Covina and Sea Crest Nurseries. I noticed a feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction because I could not see the ocean even though I knew it was within rock throwing distance. We encountered dead ends (and 5 point turn arounds) at Anderson Lane and More Ranch Road.

We were struck with the reality that there are only 1200 feet of undeveloped coastal frontage left. 600 feet belong to us and 300 feet to each of the other two adjacent owners. We began to see a vision whereby the coastal view would be enjoyed by the community and not just a select few. We could picture a strip of coastal park for walking, picnicking and enjoying the tranquility that comes from looking out to the ocean and watching the sunset. We then thought of an area in La Jolla that has a similar coastal park. We visited their park and began to get excited at the possibility of being a part of such a wonderful community asset that would live on in perpetuity.

As we looked at maps and toured the area we could see the South Patterson Ag area being transformed into a sort of Montecito by the sea with a coastal viewing park being the cornerstone of peace and relaxation.

We began to attend the long term planning meetings with the idea of presenting this vision for our neighborhood. We have spoken to the advantages of this type of use and have showed pictures of what could be. We believe you are in a position to facilitate the creation of a tremendous asset for the community. An asset that everyone can take great pride in creating. Not just a park, as wonderful as those are, but a park with a view of the Pacific.

I cannot speak for all of the S. Patterson Ag property owners, but as far as the future of our property it is very likely that we will not be using it for a nursery much longer. It is likely that there will be a great change during the life of your plan.

If the plan calls for the status quo in zoning and land use we may sell the property to one fortunate person who would build an estate home and wall off the property. We have already received unsolicited offers to buy. If that happens the coastal view would be blocked off to public view forever.

I have heard that there are those who want to preserve all ag lands as they are. I wonder what would be preserved under the status quo. I don't think the status quo would accomplish what they hope it would. Instead of preserving something the community values it would actually force large land sales for single estate homes. These new owners would likely shut off their properties in order to secure their privacy. These actions would be allowed and legal under present land use codes and certainly within the rights and privileges that come with ownership.

If the committees plan insists on no zoning changes in the S. Patterson Ag area this will be the likely outcome. There is however another option.

The committee could recommend changing the Ag zoning to a residential zone with reasonable densities. Again I can't speak for the other property owners but if we could

get the zoning change we would be open to giving the county the frontage portion for a coastal park as described above.

During the public meetings I have heard questions on how much authority this plan will have. I have heard answers from county staff that the plan will be the governing document with respect to land use and the stated goals of the plan will be enacted by the county planners. This is to say that your planning document will have great weight and specifically will determine the future use of the S Patterson Ag properties. If your plan holds to the status quo the area will become more private and less likely to be enjoyed by the community. If your plan recommends changes in these ag areas then there will be tradeoffs that will allow more enjoyment by the community at no cost to the county.

There may be some hesitation by committee members to address specific areas or even parcels. Please be advised that now is the perfect time to express your desires for the area and even for large parcels. I have been in contact with the planning department and they tell me that the consideration of zoning changes for even individual parcels has been put on hold until the desires of the committee are revealed through your land use document. This is an appropriate time to address small areas and even specific parcels if it will memorialize the intentions of the committee.

We would like the committee to join with us in creating this unique community asset by recommending a change in zoning in the S Patterson Ag area and specifically on our 33 acre parcel and possibly the two adjacent parcels to the west.

We would like to see some language in the document you are currently preparing that would express this desire.

This is a window of opportunity for all of us to work towards this wonderful goal for the area. We hope that you will allow yourself the freedom to imagine the vision I have expressed and begin the conversations that will lead to more of us enjoying this limited resource.

Very truly yours,

Bob Alm