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To:
GVPAC Members
P & D Staff – Office of Long Range Planning

Via Email

Re: Goleta Community Plan Update, December 16, 2009 meeting

Dear GVPAC members:

I was at the last meeting with Larry and Jackie Cavaletto and had to leave before public comments were opened. We will not be able to make it to the meeting tonight but I wanted to set forth some comments:

I have been a long-time resident of eastern Goleta, with my family having moved there in my youth. My wife and I and our children all graduated from San Marcos High School. We continue to live in eastern Goleta.

I have been involved in several infill projects in that area over the years trying to create infill projects that enhance the area and supplement housing choices with new high quality homes in a good area for schools and other resources. Among the projects are Sungate Ranch, Vintage Ranch, The Knoll (newly approved on Patterson) and the Cavaletto Tree Farm Infill housing project which is in process now. One clarification on that from a comment at the last meeting: while the Supervisor's in 2006 authorized a conceptual project of 161 total units on 26 acres to proceed, further detailed planning has reduced the proposed housing count to 135 total units, 110 new homes, 24 affordable rentals, and the retained Cavaletto house.

Most all of the Goleta Valley was Ag soils originally as the flatlands received the top soil from the adjacent foothills over geological time. Both existing homes on the flatlands and undeveloped land have sandy loam soil.

The Goleta water moratorium that existed from 1971 to 1997 resulted in isolated infill spots being undeveloped, unlike other urban and suburban areas. Each parcel has its own story.

The Cavaletto property had two of three parcels approved for a phase of the Cathedral Oaks Village project, but the developer did not buy water meters before the moratorium

hit, so that project was thwarted. The Cavalettos grew Christmas Trees on the site after other true (“food and fiber”) agricultural products failed (lemons, avocados). The County told the Cavalettos that they had to rezone their property from Residential to Ag to be able to sell the trees. They did so. That use ultimately failed. We started on this housing project in 1999-2000 and are still in process.

The reality of agriculture is that it is alive and well outside the urban boundaries in Santa Barbara County. There are many vast blocks of agriculture that produce a variety of crops without any conflict with adjacent urban uses.

The starting point for planning is that the urban boundary line demarks the boundary between urban uses and rural uses. That is how Santa Barbara County has developed except for some isolated “agricultural” lots within the urban boundary line. Most General Plan debates elsewhere revolve around how much the urban boundary line will be expanded. That is not being raised here, as far as I can tell.

Fundamentals of good planning state “Develop infill first.” We have closely monitored the best in national planning trends during the project’s life and have incorporated everything possible to have it qualify as a LEED Neighborhood Design, a freshly emerging concept. One deficit in the Tree Farm plan matching the LEED Neighborhood Design goals is that the density at 5.16 units per acre is lower than LEED planning principals would want.

A further basic planning concept is “what is the jobs-housing balance?” Clearly, thousands of people are commuting in to Santa Barbara jobs on a daily basis. Jobs have exceeded housing opportunities at an ever-increasing rate. Picture just the growth in UCSB alone since the 1993 Goleta Community Plan. That is not constrained by any community plan actions. There is a deficit of housing in the South Coast jobs-housing equation.

It was interesting to observe in the last hearing an apparent disconnect between the staff articulating planning concepts in planning jargon and GVPAC members and the audience trying to translate that to “o.k., how does that translate on the ground?”

In reality, each project requires a complex balancing of multiple principals and goals. This has happened for a longer period and in greater detail on the Tree Farm alone than will occur on the whole Goleta Community Plan update.

We concur with a comment by a GVPAC member at the last hearing that the future of this area may be dictated more by what next happens on existing developed lots than on the yet unbuilt lots. We have had great battles to get approval for high quality infill projects and then homes around the new project get redone in a random fashion, some extremely nicely that are beneficial to the area and others redone in a fashion that is quite detrimental to the area. We care deeply about the quality of the area as our many efforts have demonstrated.

We would be pleased to provide additional detailed input as you progress. While the Tree Farm property is not specifically within your scope, we wanted to keep you apprised of it and communicate why it matches exactly with good urban planning.

Very truly yours,

Jeff Nelson

Jeffrey C. Nelson

Cc: Larry and Jackie Cavaletto