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## **Davis can't afford Covell Village**

Subdivision will bring traffic, costs to city and housing that's not affordable

*Ken Wagstaff, James Fowler, Stan Forbes, Eric*

*Gelber, Nora Oldwin, Mark Spencer, Till Angermann,*

*Dapo Okupe, Kyaw Tha Paw U and David Balgobin*

*Special to The Enterprise*

Covell Village is not another Village Homes; it is neither slow growth nor smart growth. Six times larger and twice as dense as Village Homes, Covell Village would be a massive concentration of very big, expensive homes on tiny lots.

Proposed for the corner of Covell Boulevard and Pole Line Road, it would be the largest subdivision ever built in Davis, consisting of 1,864 units on more than 420 acres of prime farmland, almost half of which is in the 100-year floodplain.

In approving the project for the November ballot, the council majority disregarded the concerns of its advisory commissions. The Finance and Budget, Planning and Open Space commissions could not support the project. In making its decision, the council ignored key environmental findings and contradictions in the fiscal analysis that identified serious financial risks for the city, a failure to provide promised affordable housing and traffic and other infrastructure impacts.

The commissions studied the analyses. The contrast between their advice and the council's push to develop is troubling — and underscores the council's failure to respect the citizens' vision for Davis.

### Costs

**Covell Village** would cost the city money. The Finance and Budget Commission rejected the project, citing the "magnitude of the risk that this project poses to the City Council's goal of fiscal stability." Because **Covell Village** would require annexation, the city would get 30 percent less property tax than if it developed parcels within the city limits, like Hunt-Wesson.

Recently, the county has made it clear it wants an even greater share of the project's property tax, and won't approve the annexation unless the new arrangement is to its liking. Each 1 percent increase in the county's share will cost the city an extra \$3 million annually — making **Covell Village** an even greater tax burden.

In addition, the city's fiscal analysis assumes home prices will double over the next 15 years. If housing prices level off or decline as many economists predict, **Covell Village** would generate huge deficits for the city.

Finally, the impact fees charged to the developers do not address infrastructure needs likely to be triggered by **Covell Village**, such as the widening of roads or that the subdivision would contribute significantly to the premature exhaustion of the capacity of our wastewater treatment plant. Public Works has stated that expansion of the plant would cost at least \$100 million over and above water quality improvement costs.

### Unaffordable housing

The developers' illusory promise of affordable housing is equally disturbing. The original rationale for **Covell Village** was to provide "workforce" housing for our teachers, firefighters, new UC Davis faculty and staff, Davis renters wishing to buy — and our children.

Instead, housing will be largely unaffordable to these and similar target groups. Although the developers claim that two-thirds of the subdivision will be affordable, city projections indicate the average for-sale house will cost \$683,945.

The city's analysis indicates that "middle-income" families (those making less than \$96,000 a year) cannot afford housing costing more than \$387,000. Yet 92 percent of the for-sale houses in the subdivision will cost more than \$400,000. The least expensive single-family detached house will cost \$538,000.

In other words, of the 1,294 for-sale units proposed, only 99 are affordable, according to city criteria. This means only 10 affordable for-sale units per year, primarily townhouses, versus 120 upper-end units constructed annually.

#### Traffic, safety and health

The negative impacts of **Covell Village** go well beyond dollar calculations; according to the city's environmental impact report, we will all be spending a lot more time in traffic. The subdivision will double traffic on Covell Boulevard to 39,400 cars per day and on Pole Line Road to 26,900 cars per day, and use up 97 percent of the capacity on the Mace Boulevard overcrossing.

The analysis finds that Level of Service F results, triggering "high delays, high volumes and extensive queuing" on many streets and intersections, including L Street, Moore Boulevard and the Pole Line Road overcrossing to South Davis.

According to the EIR, "Conditions are intolerable for most drivers," with traffic backing up on neighborhood streets, causing all the associated safety and pollution issues for children, seniors and those with respiratory conditions.

In addition, Woodland is building the 4,000-unit Spring Lake subdivision, just five minutes north on Pole Line Road. Spring Lake by itself will have a serious negative impact on traffic along Pole Line and Covell.

#### Alternatives

Opposition to the **Covell Village** subdivision does not equate with a "no change" or "no growth" philosophy. **Covell Village** is not inevitable; we have alternatives.

Proponents want us to believe that if we don't approve the project, we will get something worse. However, in Davis, voters have the final say on any council-approved peripheral projects.

As for the county approving development on its own without our input, the fear is unfounded, for two reasons. First, under the terms of a recently revised agreement with the county, city approval is required for development on our borders; for this veto power we give the county a share of our property tax revenue. This "pass-through" agreement runs for another 20 years. Withdrawing from the agreement would cost the county millions in guaranteed revenues.

Second, to be feasible, urban-scale development in the county would require use of the city's sewer system, wastewater treatment facility and other city utilities — we would have to agree.

Instead of **Covell Village**, Davis can choose change on a more manageable scale — change that will allow us to augment our diversity by building truly affordable housing without undermining city finances and services or

our quality of life. The 100-acre site of the old Hunt-Wesson cannery and the 27-acre PG&E site at Fifth and L streets are prime candidates for redevelopment. The PG&E site, for example, is within walking distance of the downtown and the Southern Pacific Depot.

Rather than respect the legacy created by citizens and city councils over the last three decades and reflected in our General Plan — of Davis as a small, safe neighborhood-oriented community — this City Council majority has chosen sprawl instead.

By saying "no" to a large peripheral subdivision at this time, voters will be affirming the Davis they love and envision. They will be reminding the council for the value of sustainable city financing, affordable housing, farmland preservation and sensible traffic and infrastructure planning.

— Ken Wagstaff is a former mayor of Davis, James Fowler is an assistant professor of political science at UC Davis, Stan Forbes is a former Davis City Council member, Eric Gelber is a housing and disability rights attorney, Nora Oldwin is a former Birch Lane Elementary School PTA president, Mark Spencer is a former Davis Planning Commissioner and Open Space Commissioner, Till Angermann is a hydrogeologist, Dapo Okupe is a Caltrans senior traffic engineer, Kyaw Tha Paw U is a UC Davis professor of atmospheric science and David Balgobin is a wastewater treatment engineer.

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