

# The Davis Enterprise

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## **Planning should be citizen-based not developer-driven**

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*Special to The Enterprise*

In 1992, we, as members of the Growth Management and Neighborhood Preservation Committee, along with more than 200 Davis citizens on other committees, volunteered to work on the update of the 1987 General Plan.

We spent many hours on comprehensive recommendations to guide city government and future land use policy. In light of recent City Council action, we come together now for the first time since finishing our work in 1995, to express our concern for the fate of citizen-based planning in Davis.

The City Council majority has taken steps to overturn the citizens' General Plan, to place Davis on a fast growth track, starting with Covell Village. Covell Village is the largest development ever proposed in Davis. It would pave over 422 acres of county farmland outside the city limits.

We are concerned about the council's disregard for our citizen-based 2001 General Plan. This is a clear change in direction to rapidly expand Davis' borders and population.

### Growth Management Committee

Our committee was a diverse group of 18 volunteers, including two of today's Covell Village Partners and another developer. The partners consistently argued to include their site in the General Plan.

City staff kept our committee informed on city and county development trends and growth policies. We learned about the principles of "smart growth." We studied growth projections from the numerous large developments already under way. It became alarmingly clear that the large Covell Village site should not be developed.

We determined that the city would fulfill its regional growth commitment without developing this site. In fact, due to accelerated residential growth and contrary to Davis voters' desire for growth to be "as slow as legally possible" — declared in their approval of Measure L in 1986 — Davis' growth actually exceeded this commitment.

In only 12 years following adoption of the 1987 General Plan, Davis' rapid growth consumed more than 30 percent of the city's land. This growth was to have taken 23 years, but instead it occurred more than twice as fast! Davis schools became overcrowded, services overburdened, infrastructure overwhelmed and our city budget overspent. Slowing down our growth was a necessity for the city to recover from all of the "front-loading" and the problems that it brought.

### Covell Village site

At one point, the other General Plan update committees were invited to consider several options for the Covell Village site. Five committees chose the 688-housing-unit option but they were not aware of the many hundreds of housing units from projects already approved, such as Wildhorse, Evergreen, Aspen, Oakshade, Walnut Park, Woodbridge, Willowcreek and South Park. These five committees did not choose the larger 1,247-housing-unit option.

Our land use committee preferred that the Covell Village site be restored to an agriculture designation to avoid a continuation of rapid "front-loading" from the numerous projects in the pipeline.

Notably, none of the committees nor city staff ever supported the concept of building north of the drainage channel. This is where the 100-year flood plain is and where most Covell Village housing is now proposed to be built!

### A history of problems

We recall the Crossroads proposal for the Covell Village site, made just before the General Plan update began. Crossroads proposed 1,466 units. It failed to get through the planning process because traffic problems could not be resolved. The site allows access only from the east side (Pole Line Road) and from a limited southern border (Covell Boulevard).

Crossroads went bankrupt in the early 1990s and the Covell Village Partners bought the 386 acres of mostly prime farmland for only \$3 million. Despite previous research establishing that traffic for 1,466 units could not be resolved, Covell Village is now proposing 1,864 units. The site is adjacent to the city's former landfill site and vinyl chloride toxics have been reported.

### The Covell Village EIR

The Covell Village environmental impact report projects "Level of Service F" traffic. Specifically, conditions at several roadway segments and intersections would be "intolerable to most drivers." Air quality deterioration would be "significant and unavoidable." Unbelievably, more than half of the project would be built in the 100-year flood plain.

Clearly, this is not "smart" planning. Smart planning would consider development of the adjacent Hunt-Wesson infill site, on 200 acres already within the city, rather than pave over hundreds of acres of prime farmland.

Worse yet, the city would get reduced property tax from Covell Village. It is on county land, requiring a tax split. Advertised as "affordable," Covell Village actually would produce hundreds of expensive homes averaging \$700,000. It would bring higher costs to Davis residents due to infrastructure and city services costs.

For our future, vote no

Davis is at a turning point. Covell Village would be the locomotive for a train of other large subdivisions to follow. Without any fiscal analysis, the City Council majority opted to add a fast growth policy of 250 units per year to our General Plan. This would mean annexing 300 to 500 acres, or another Mace Ranch, every five years!

If Covell Village were approved, regional planning authorities would assign Davis a higher growth rate, locking us to fast growth into the future. The expected result would be much like the "developers' General Plan," where many developers submitted large proposals surrounding Davis just before the adoption of the 2001 General Plan. Davis would evolve into a large city with an exploding population over 75,000 — with all the attendant traffic, public safety, infrastructure and cost problems.

We urge Davis voters to support our citizen-based General Plan and vote no on Measure X on Nov. 8.

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