

Bay Point: Local activists have help decrying pool problems

By [Sam Richards](#)

srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: **02/10/2016** 10:57:35 AM PST Updated: about 18 hours ago

BAY POINT -- Local critics of flagging plans for renovation of the Ambrose Park community swimming pool are getting some help from a Richmond-based advocacy group.

The local group West Pittsburg for Progress has been a local affiliate of the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, a nonprofit community organization helping residents of low- to moderate-income neighborhoods fight for economic, racial and social justice. It has six offices statewide; the nearest are in Richmond and Oakland.

Members of West Pittsburg for Progress plan on making their displeasure with the pool project known Thursday night at the February Ambrose Recreation and Park District meeting. Jovana Fajardo, a community organizer with ACCE, said she will be there with them. It's important, she said, because the Bay Point community has relatively few amenities for kids and teens.

"We understand we're not going to get an Olympic-size swimming pool like you'd see in Blackhawk, but we want to see some progress," said Fajardo, who grew up in Bay Point.

The refurbishing project for the Ambrose pool, which closed in 2009, has been seven years in the planning, a process that has included repeated money shortages and three project redesigns. The most recent opening date the district had given was July 2016.

At the park district's January meeting, it was announced that the lowest among the latest round of bids for the project was \$682,000 more expensive than planned -- about 25 percent higher than the estimated cost of to rebuild the pool and replace the restrooms and associated outbuildings at the pool in Ambrose Park. The rebid process, when it is approved, will push the opening date back at least several months, if that \$682,000 can be obtained somehow.

Thursday's Ambrose Recreation and Park District board meeting begins at 6 p.m. at the Ambrose Community Center, 3105 Willow Pass Road in Bay Point.

LAFCO: No on SE Quad

Posted: Wednesday, February 17, 2016 6:57 pm

Morgan Hill officials will have to overcome a ream of criticism in order to convince a county commission to approve the city's Southeast Quadrant agricultural preservation and sports-recreation-leisure land use program.

The staff of the Santa Clara County Local Agency Formation Commission issued a report Feb. 15 recommending its seven-member commission deny the city's proposal to extend its Urban Service Area around about 229 acres of mostly rural farmland on the east side of U.S. 101. The commission will consider the project, as well as a second boundary extension request from the city on the southwest side of town, at the March 11 meeting in San Jose.

The recommendation and nearly 500 pages of accompanying documents echoes LAFCO staff's previous correspondence with City Hall on the SEQ proposal over the last six-plus years. The LAFCO staff report says the city's boundary extension plan would result in the loss of 229 acres of prime agricultural land, "a rapidly diminishing resource in the county," and existing city limits contain ample vacant land for the type of development proposed in the SEQ.

Proponents of the SEQ plan said after scanning LAFCO's voluminous recommendation Tuesday, the report contains numerous errors. For example, developer Gordon Jacoby said the report identifies a "dead orchard" at the corner of Barrett and Murphy avenues as prime agriculture. And it states there is no drinking water going to the 22-acre farm site located at the interchange of U.S. 101 and Tennant Avenue—purchased by the city in 2014 for the future development of sports fields—which is not true, Jacoby said.

"This alarmist attitude one might have is based on a lack of familiarity with the area," Jacoby speculated.

But more importantly, SEQ proponents note that the LAFCO report ignores two key roadblocks to ag preservation under current conditions: that agriculture is "dying" in the SEQ due to high land values and other rising costs; and the "irreversible" sprouting of mini-mansions on large lots in the



SEQ

Pictured is one of five homes under construction on Trail Drive, butting up against active farmland in the city's Southeast Quadrant.

SEQ that are slowly eliminating existing agriculture already.

“They’re ignoring the fact that if we do nothing, the status quo isn’t going to preserve agriculture,” said real estate broker John Telfer, who represents property owners in the SEQ project area.

Indeed, on Trail Drive, which sits just outside the eastern boundary of the city’s proposed boundary extension, under construction are five estate homes butting up against active farmland with thriving crops.

“That took 20 to 30 acres out of ag, but there’s no mitigation behind it,” City Manager Steve Rymer added. The city’s SEQ plan would stop this residential takeover of farmland almost as soon as LAFCO approves it, he said.

But the scathing LAFCO report insinuates the city’s promise of ag preservation is a disingenuous gambit, and this broader plan “suggests an entirely different long-term vision—less agricultural and more like the beginnings of a new city neighborhood,” the staff report states.

“Thus the proposal in many ways is a classic example of the type of urban sprawl, and unnecessary/premature conversion of prime agricultural lands that was prevalent in the county during the 1950s and 1960s,” reads the LAFCO report. “Such projects and concerns were the impetus for the State Legislature’s creation of LAFCO in 1963 and for the local adoption and use of city USA boundaries as a key planning and growth management tool since 1972.”

Supporters say funding is there

The city submitted the SEQ application to LAFCO in October 2015, shortly after the city council voted 4-1 to do so. Mayor Pro Tem Rich Constantine voted against the application, stating he thinks it doesn’t do enough to preserve agriculture.

The only definite projects proposed in the SEQ USA extension area are a Catholic High School on a 40-acre property near the intersection of Murphy and Tennant avenues, and the city’s baseball/softball fields effort on Jacoby’s former property. Other “speculative” uses include 40,000 square feet of sports oriented retails, 3,000 square feet of sports-themed restaurant space, 20,000 square feet of medical offices for sports injuries, up to 120 acres of sports fields, 100,000 square feet of indoor sports facility, two 120-room hotels, a gas station and about 100,000 square feet of other retail.

The Morgan Hill Unified School District recently approached the Puliafico family to purchase their 39-acre property in the SEQ for a future high school or middle school site, according to the LAFCO report.

Telfer, who represents the Puliaficos, said the family told MHUSD they are not interested because they believe in the city’s sports and recreation development plan for the quadrant.

Of the 21 parcels comprising the 229-acre extension area, which sits entirely in unincorporated

county jurisdiction, 12 are zoned for agriculture (which allows single residences on 8- to 10-acre lots), seven are uncultivated and two are strictly residential. Under the city's proposal, three of the parcels—those at the future site of the Catholic high school—would be rezoned for “public facilities.” The rest would be zoned “Sports-Recreation-Leisure” to allow for the variety of proposed sports and supporting commercial uses.

The city's SEQ proposal is part of a larger, more complex program known as the Citywide Agricultural Lands Preservation program, which would employ developer fees and other funding to preserve any farmland plowed up for sports fields or commercial uses. This plan includes a proposed “transfer of development rights” (TDR) program that would allow one (so far) SEQ property owner—the Chiala family—to cluster 160 homes on a portion of their property while permanently preserving existing farmland. This property is located just east of the proposed USA boundary extension, which would end just west of the intersection of Tennant Avenue and Hill Road.

The LAFCO report continues to state that the city has “minimal existing urban infrastructure” to support development in the SEQ project, and “has not adequately demonstrated the ability to provide and fund the necessary services to the new area.”

Plus, fiscal projections of tax revenue from the proposed land uses in the SEQ are based on commercial concepts that are “only speculative,” and major components of the plan do not conform with the city's or county's General Plans.

City Manager Steve Rymer takes exception to LAFCO's suggestion that the city is not fiscally responsible enough to administer services to the SEQ area. He added that he thinks of the stated goals of the city and its opponents in the SEQ are all the same; they just have different visions of how to go about preserving ag and preventing sprawl.

“We believe we have a plan that is responsible, funded and sustainable into the future,” Rymer said.

The city's ag mitigation plan aims to preserve an acre of farmland for every acre plowed up for sports, school or commercial development in the SEQ. The city anticipates a cost of about \$50,000 per acre to establish an easement on agricultural property, prohibiting any future uses other than farming. Developers would pay \$15,000 per acre, with the city supplementing the remaining \$35,000 from its Open Space Fund, Rymer explained. That fund currently holds about \$6 million, and is expected to grow by at least another \$5 million over the next five years. That leaves enough funds to preserve about 250 acres of agriculture in the SEQ, the program's preferred target for preservation.

The fair market value of land in the SEQ surpasses \$200,000 per acre in some areas. The city purchased Jacoby's 22-acre property for about \$238,000 per acre.

The TDR program in the works would provide a third crucial funding mechanism to preserve ag land farther east in the SEQ, according to proponents.

Steady opposition

Included in the Feb. 15 LAFCO report are 26 letters from local organizations and residents, offering input and opinions on the SEQ proposal. Most of these were opposed to the plan, and some were asking for more time to process the city's request.

A lengthy letter from the county's Open Space Authority notes that Santa Clara County has lost half its farmland to urban development in the last 30 years. About 27,000 acres of ag remain, mostly in South County and Coyote Valley.

"In the OSA's Santa Clara Valley Greenprint, the SEQ is identified as one of 10 important land areas to be conserved through coordinated planning, partnerships and strategic conservation investment," reads part of the letter from OSA General Manager Andrea Mackenzie.

The letter goes on to list numerous shortfalls of the SEQ plan, including the city's failure to demonstrate why developing the farmland is crucial, inconsistencies between the city's plan and regional preservation efforts and potential financial roadblocks to the city's ag preservation strategy.

The LAFCO report offers the commission options to approve a portion or all of the city's SEQ proposal. But such an approval would require a "statement of overriding considerations" because the 2014 Environmental Impact Report for the project, which was commissioned by the city, lists impacts to "air quality/greenhouse gases, noise and transportation" that cannot be mitigated below a "significant" level. Therefore, if the commission approves a portion of the project under this EIR, it would declare that the educational and/or economic benefits of the SEQ proposal outweigh any potential environmental damage.

Contra Costa Times

Martinez: Budget, park renovations focus of State of the City

By Dana Guzzetti
[Correspondent](#)

Posted: 02/17/2016 10:45:46 AM PST Updated: 14 min. ago

MARTINEZ -- Mayor Rob Schroder focused on the positives: a balanced budget with a \$5.3 million reserve and Measure H renovations at Susana Street, Mountain View and Hidden Lakes parks during his State of the City address.

The mayor also outlined plans for street improvements and capital projects "coming in the next year," including Alhambra Creek Bridge at Berrellesa Street, upper pedestrian bridge and entrance road (both to north intermodal parking lot), and \$2.1 million committed to street and road repair projects.

Schroder said gas tax revenues for future road maintenance are shrinking because of a lower rate of fossil fuel consumption, the falling price of oil and a recent state practice of using gas tax funds to pay down state transportation debt.

At the Feb. 9 presentation, he said the city will have to find other ways to help pay for the "backlog" of street and road maintenance work. Federal and state grants, a sales tax or use of reserves are among solutions the mayor mentioned.

Work on the Martinez General Plan began seven years ago. Following public comment on the draft general plan and environmental impact report last fall, the city staff began reviewing it for possible revisions, according to Schroder.

The revised plan will go to the Planning Commission, back to the council, then be up for public comment, before returning to the Planning Commission and final approval by the council.

Schroder did not say what has taken so long, but talked about his role as a LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) member, and definitions of open space and urban sprawl.

"These questions have not been definitively answered, but one thing has been made very clear in our deliberations: just because a piece of property is vacant does not mean that it should be designated as open space and never developed."

There was no mention of the controversial proposed development at former Pine Meadow Golf Course, where property zoned as recreational/open space was changed to allow a housing development.

Schroder also reported that "much progress" has been made in the earthquake retrofit of downtown buildings, and that Martinez is one of 22 cities competing in the "Cool California Challenge," a contest to encourage energy and water conservation.

Schroder talked about other challenges.

"The waterfront and marina continues to be our biggest challenge," he said. "Year after year I have been reporting on our plans for reconstruction and negotiations with the state of California."

The mayor said it would take \$6 million to rebuild sea walls, the entrance and docks. The city is already \$4.2 million in debt to the state for past marina loans, and does not produce enough income from the area to start making payments when they come due in the next few years.

After the address he explained progress has been slow partly because the council has been busy with other priorities. It is presently considering the amended general plan that, if approved Feb. 17, could result in construction at Waterfront Park by fall with completion by fall 2017. (The remaining \$1.3 million of Measure WW funding is committed to that project.)

However, that plan does not include marina improvements still in the planning stages. "I feel frustrated with the marina," Schroder said. "It has been one problem after another ... Other agencies have to approve what goes there. It's complicated."

In the interim, citizen proposals for improvements such as a privately funded restaurant, dog park or other uses have been stalled.

Consensus at community workshops resulted in the gravel parking lot behind the Sea Scout Albatross building as an ideal site for a privately funded dog park.

Schroder explained that it would be premature to allow it, or other uses, such as a restaurant until a master plan is completed because those improvements might conflict with future other potential uses. There are talks with the California Maritime Academy for a possible presence at the marina, he said.

Contact Dana Guzzetti at dguzzetti10@gmail.com or call 925-202-9292.

Contra Costa Times

Kensington police director: Chief knew officers were watching her car before controversial traffic stop

By [Thomas Peele](#)

tpeele@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: **02/20/2016** 07:43:49 PM PST Updated: about 21 hours ago

KENSINGTON -- Two weeks before two police officers pulled over an elected official in what she alleges was an act of harassment, this small town's interim police chief told her that cops had been reporting to him about the location of her car, she and others are claiming

Police district director Vanessa Cordova said Saturday that interim Chief Kevin Hart's remarks at dinner during a government conference in Monterey on Sept. 21 show she was being targeted well before the two officers stopped her in Berkeley on Oct. 7, threatened to arrest her and detained her for 45 minutes before ticketing her for not having a front license plate. She's said the officers appeared to be waiting for her on a side street.

Rachelle Sherris-Watt, Cordova's colleague on the police board, said Saturday she heard Hart's comments. A Kensington fire district director, Janis Kosel, said she was also at the dinner, and Cordova was talking about Hart's remark's immediately afterward.

Neither Hart nor police board president Len Welsh answered requests for comment.

Cordova said Hart told her, "I understand your car is getting serviced." It was, but she said she found his knowledge of that disturbing. "I said, 'How would you know that?'"

Hart replied that as police chief "I know everything" and 'more than one officer' had told him where her car was, Cordova said. "It was all very awkward," she said, adding that she asked him, "Do you know where every director's car is?" Hart didn't answer, she said.

Sherris-Watt heard the exchange. "I was taken aback," she said. Hart's remarks were "unusual, inexplicable."

Cordova said she has chosen to publicly reveal the exchange now that an administrative investigation of the matter, which that been farmed out to the Richmond Police Department, is complete and in Hart's hands. Hart said at a public meeting on Feb. 11 that he would be making "a final decision" on whether to discipline the cops involved, Sgt. Keith Barrow and Officer Manny Ramos.

Cordova said she'd been told that whatever recommendation that Richmond police made would be final. But Hart said at the meeting he will "either concur or not concur" with the findings.

Cordova said Saturday that "at the eleventh hour Hart appears to be changing the rules." Both she and Sherris-Watt called for him to recuse himself from deciding anything about the matter. Cordova said she had told Richmond police about Hart's remarks and was surprised that he apparently wasn't interviewed. Neither was Sherris-Watt, despite Cordova also telling investigators her colleague was present.

Coming nine months after this newspaper reported that Barrow's gun and badge had been stolen by a prostitute in Reno, Cordova's harassment claim further roiled politics in this affluent West Contra Costa town, where nearly all the board's business involves the 10-member police department. Hart, a Dublin councilman and a retired Alameda County Sheriff Department's deputy, took the helm of the department last year when the board cut off contract negotiations with Chief Greg Harman, effectively firing him for his handling of the Reno debacle. An audit by the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office of Harman's investigation of Barrow found it was not done to professional police standards.

But Hart is now finding himself in the Kensington hot seat. At the Feb. 11 meeting, resident John Gaccione told the board that Hart "appears to be playing politics with a director who does not support his spending policies" and "may lack the professional skills to manage sensitive personnel matters."

But others claimed the process was not being allowed to play out. Former director Linda Lipscomb said she had once gotten a ticket in Kensington for not having a front license plate. Resident Andrew Reed said the proceeding had become "a Kangaroo Court."

It is unclear when and how much of the investigation will be made public. State law blocks public disclosure of police personnel matters. Hart said he had turned the Richmond report over to district lawyers to decide what could be said about it.

Follow Thomas Peele at [Twitter.com/Thomas_Peele](https://twitter.com/Thomas_Peele).

UPDATE: Southwest expansion proposal a product of MH growth

Posted: Wednesday, February 24, 2016 3:59 pm

Surrounding Royal Oaks Mushrooms on Watsonville Road in southwest Morgan Hill was virtually “nothing” in the way of homes or any other kind of development when Robert Vantassel, now the farm’s operations manager, started working there in the 1980s.

He remembers some scattered row crops in the area, and what his grandparents called “permanent pasture” in the vicinity of the mushroom farm. He faintly recalls a gas station across Monterey Road, which forms the eastern boundary of Royals Oaks’ property.

Now, most of those fields host residential neighborhoods, new roads and small retail businesses. Monterey Road is a bustling commuter thoroughway. Oakwood School and Morgan Hill Bible Church (which also houses a school) neighbor Royal Oaks to the south and east, respectively.

There remain some vacant fields and active farmland—as well as large residential lots—to the south and west of the mushroom farm, but the increasing mixture of urban and rural land uses in such close proximity is at the crux of the debate over whether the City of Morgan Hill should annex properties such as Royal Oaks and farms in the Southeast Quadrant into the city limits.

“In the mid-1990s they built the school, and then the condos across the street, and it became very difficult for me to continue to farm there,” said Royal Oaks owner Don Hordness. “I decided to move my business. In order to do that, we needed to get this thing sold.”

In 2013, the Santa Clara County Local Agency Formation Commission approved the annexation of Royal Oaks’ Morgan Hill farming operation, which employs 55 people on about eight acres. But Royal Oaks owns about another seven acres (mostly vacant) to the west of the mushroom growing facility.

The city’s proposed extension of its Urban Service Area boundary around the remainder of Royal Oaks’ property, Oakwood School, Morgan Hill Bible Church, adjacent residential properties, a strip mall and other remaining farmland—collectively known as “Area 2”—will be considered by



Royal Oaks Mushrooms

Miguel Ramos packs freshly picked mushrooms at Royal Oaks Mushrooms on Watsonville Road Feb. 23.

the LAFCO board at its March 11 meeting. (“Area 1,” the SEQ project, is on the same meeting agenda.)

The Area 1 proposal has been in the works for about a decade, Hordness said.

Hordness wants to complete the annexation of his property and move his agricultural operation to a less populated area. He plans to one day develop the Morgan Hill site into a 123-unit senior housing complex if LAFCO approves the USA extension—a precursor to a city limits expansion.

The Area 2 request includes a total of 17 parcels. Other properties are the 24.5-acre Oakwood School campus; a 2.2-acre property owned by the Santa Clara Valley Water District; the 8.7-acre Morgan Hill Bible Church site; an approximately three-acre commercial site consisting of a hair salon, masonry operation, tool supply and the Bay Area Chrysanthemum Growers’ Co-op; and seven low-density residential properties, according to the LAFCO report.

LAFCO staff has recommended denying the project, primarily because the city limits already encircle ample vacant land to develop the kind of projects proposed in the USA extension request.

“The City has enough residentially designated vacant land within its existing boundaries to accommodate its residential growth needs for the next eight to 24 years,” reads part of the LAFCO staff report. “The proposed USA expansion would result in unnecessary conversion of prime agricultural lands and would create further land use conflicts with surrounding agricultural lands and encourage development of additional lands.”

In addition to the senior housing complex on Hordness’ property, other proposed changes in the USA request area include an expansion of Morgan Hill Bible Church, more sports fields and classrooms at Oakwood School, and about 117,000 square feet of unspecified, non-retail commercial uses on six of the smaller parcels, according to the LAFCO report.

The city and the property owners submitted a nearly identical USA extension request to LAFCO in 2013, but the seven-member commission approved only the mushroom farm. The other properties were rejected for similar reasons cited in the current staff report.

This time, City Hall and property owners think they have a better chance of gaining LAFCO’s blessing because the city now has an agricultural mitigation policy. The city council adopted this policy in 2015, requiring any developer who builds on farmland within the city limits to pay a mitigation fee that goes toward the permanent preservation of an equal acreage of agricultural property elsewhere in Morgan Hill (preferably in the SEQ, which sits on the east side of U.S. 101).

The city even submitted an agreement to LAFCO, signed by Hordness Jan. 13, in which the Royal Oaks owner promises to provide such mitigation when he is finally able to develop the residential project. Hordness said the LAFCO staff recommendation is “irritating.”

“The city and myself have worked really hard to get the plan in place,” Hordness said. “After the (agreement) was done, I gave it to LAFCO and thought they would be happy, and they weren’t.”

Long time coming?

Other properties in the Area 2 expansion request, such as Morgan Hill Bible Church, simply want to use nearby city services to facilitate their growth.

“We’re wanting to be in the city so we can take advantage of the water line in front of our property instead of staying on a well, and move away from having a septic field and take advantage of local services,” said Pastor David Whitaker.

LAFCO staff say including this property in the USA would “potentially increase urban/rural land use conflicts for adjacent/surrounding lands and likely put undue development pressures on those lands.”

A letter from nearby homeowner Rod Braughton stated his and neighbors’ opposition to the USA expansion and a proposed cell tower on the Bible Church’s property. Attached to his letter is a petition signed by 17 of his neighbors.

The homeowners think the USA expansion would “add to urban sprawl (and)... add an intrusion to a quiet, rural setting.”

The LAFCO report also notes that some of the properties in the Area 2 USA request are already in the city limits, but not in the USA.

Mayor Steve Tate, who voted along with the rest of the city council to approve the LAFCO request in September 2015, said this creates an awkward boundary situation that the city hopes to rectify. He added that while there is “definitely” a supply of properties within the city limits available for development, the 67-acre area south of Watsonville Road is a “prime” area for the type of growth proposed there.

“We put Butterfield Boulevard all the way through it. It’s close to good transportation corridors. We think it’s suitable for development going forward,” Tate said.

Royal Oaks and other mushroom farms in South County appear to be thriving, as the fungus is the number two top money-making crop in the county (behind nursery crops). The mushroom industry in 2014 made about \$72.1 million.

However, mushrooms grow in compost, which can emit an unpleasant odor for nearby residents. While Royal Oaks doesn’t produce its compost at the Morgan Hill facility, on days when they move the material from Hollister the neighbors can be affected.

Oakwood School Executive Director Ted Helvey said he “couldn’t be more supportive” of the redevelopment of the nearby Royal Oaks site for this reason, even though the school is in favor of

local agriculture in general.

Hordness added that the surrounding housing and proposed development at Royal Oaks makes it difficult to improve the agricultural site, and commuter and residential traffic is not compatible with the transportation of farm equipment.

“I couldn’t go in there and expand the facility, and make it state of the art,” he said. “Urban use does not fit with agriculture.”

Royal Oaks has production properties in Gilroy and Hollister that can accommodate the existing Morgan Hill operation and workforce, Hordness added.

Published February 24th, 2016

Orinda Response Times Frustrate MOFD

By Nick Marnell



MOFD engine navigates Sleepy Hollow Lane in north Orinda. Photo courtesy Moraga-Orinda Fire District

district to improve inadequate emergency response times into the Sleepy Hollow, Orinda Downs and Upper El Toyonal portions of north Orinda, it should relocate station 45 to a site near the Camino Pablo and Miner Road intersection. Healy said that the district has no money to do that, and furthermore, he noted that moving station 45 would place it farther away from target hazards in Orinda, like Highway 24, the Caldecott Tunnel, the BART tunnels, senior assisted living facilities and a convalescent hospital. "This is an example of how every contemplated fire station relocation has potential positive and negative effects," he said.

The report also called for structuring aid agreements with adjacent Alameda County and East Bay Regional Parks fire districts. Healy said that MOFD has executed automatic aid and mutual aid agreements with the Berkeley Fire Department and EBRP.

Some have proposed using smaller, more nimble apparatus to quickly navigate that difficult terrain and those narrow roadways. "What we'd pick up in size we'd give up in tools and equipment," said the chief. District union representative Anthony Perry agreed. "The narrow roads and numerous blind spots of Orinda dictate the speed of the apparatus," he said. "A smaller response vehicle would have the same limitations, and yield no faster response."

As for those narrow roads, the district can expect no help from the city of Orinda. According to Chuck Swanson, director of public works and engineering services, Orinda is only reconstructing the road pavement, and because of the high cost will not be widening or straightening the city roads. "Also, many of our residents like the semi-rural character of the roads the way they are," he said.

In that case, those residents need to prepare themselves even more so for a major disaster, when evacuation times will matter maybe more than response times. District emergency preparedness coordinator Dennis Rein advises Orinda residents to not wait for the community warning system alert, but to take action on their own. "If there is any doubt in your mind, go," he said.

As Healy works on his Standards of Coverage document, and his geographic information system

For years emergency medical call response times in Orinda have exceeded those in Moraga. The terrain and the narrow, winding roads in sections of Orinda make it difficult for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to safely transport personnel and equipment to the emergency scenes. As fire chief Stephen Healy prepares to update the MOFD Standards of Coverage, a deployment analysis of district resources, he again confronts the reality of the lengthier Orinda emergency response times and what, if anything, can be done to reduce them.

Based on district records, the 2011 average medical emergency response time in Orinda ran six minutes and 15 seconds. The 2015 average Orinda response time jumped to a hair under seven minutes. The Moraga times rose from five minutes and 47 seconds to just over six minutes.

A 2011 MOFD facilities report stated that for the

analyst crunches the numbers yet again, the chief conceded that the fact of longer response times in Orinda will not go away.

"It may be an unavoidable issue," he said.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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January Projected Reopening of Lafayette Station 16

By Nick Marnell

Inside the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District 2016 Operational Plan lies one sentence that Lafayette residents have been waiting to read for nearly four years: the district will propose to its board that "we open a newly rebuilt Fire Station 16 in January 2017."

The county closed the uninhabitable Lafayette fire station in 2012, and as the proposed station 46 joint venture between ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District dragged on, ConFire opted to rebuild its own station for \$1 million rather than spend three times the money to erect a shared station at the Lafayette-Orinda border.

A structural engineer delivered the district a positive report on the condition of the building, and ConFire awaits the results of a geothermal test on the soil beneath the floor slab. The report should be completed by mid-March. "The slab has settled, probably as a result of soil loss under it, and will most likely require us to mitigate surface runoff from the street," said fire chief Jeff Carman.

Concurrently, the district will select an architect, and should then be ready to draw documents and put out bids for the station construction. Once all of the documents are prepared, the district will secure a rough price estimate and be then able to go to its board for project approval.

"We are still feeling good about our original direction that we can use the existing foundation and rebuild the station," said the chief. "With anything like this, we are prepared for the unexpected and think we can react to whatever is thrown our way. Worst case scenario is we will have to rebuild the entire structure, which I think we are even prepared for should that happen."

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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OPINION: Annexation Would Be Good for Gilroy

Ron Kirkish | Posted: Thursday, February 25, 2016 4:43 pm

LAFCO’S 1984 report is the example of what smart growth is truly all about. This same report was then extended in 2006, and again in 2014, without modifications, 30-plus years!

It takes into account land use for agriculture, commercial, and residential for now and the future, and LAFCO was intentionally created by the state of California to prevent sprawl and unmitigated growth as was done in San Jose and other cities of Santa Clara County during the early 1960s.



721 acres

In fact, this 30-plus year odyssey began in 1969 when LAFCO allowed Gilroy to annex two smaller properties that lay within the boundaries of Subarea 3—this was a whopping 47 years ago.

How can anyone with knowledge of the truth about LAFCO’s 30-year “Sphere of Influence Study for Gilroy” believe that the annexation of Subarea 3 (Rancho Los Olivos) is being “fast-tracked,” as claimed by Gilroy Growing Smarter?

Indeed, over the last 30 years, the city of Gilroy has strictly followed LAFCO’s 30-year-old report and its specified guidelines to a “T.”

Innuendos of conspiracies are merely tactics to prohibit growth, while trying to vilify those like Mayor Perry Woodward, Councilmembers Cat Tucker, Terri Aulman, and Peter Leroe-Muñoz.

These members of the City Council have well served our community for many years and are truly the responsible leaders of our city, who have the political and moral backbone and judgment to do the right thing for Gilroy’s future.

In 1984, LAFCO designated Subareas 2 & 3 as the priority areas slated for future residential growth and it took 33 years for the city of Gilroy to finally decide it is time to consider annexing it into the city for future development 15 to 20 years from now, when the current properties available within the city have been built out and there is no more land available to develop.

In the meantime, the city would have ample time to plan the area layout for the future; gas, electric, sewer lines, sidewalks and streets, traffic flow, stop signs and lights, telephone lines, in order to design the whole project properly and avoid the sprawl that smaller projects are known to cause.

Without this annexation, the city will still have RDOs available but no land to build on, which is hardly a good thing for the future vitality and vibrancy of our city, its businesses, and jobs.

Already, the city of Gilroy finds itself without enough cheap land to build a new school that is necessary to meet our current needs, even though there is enough money available to build it. The only available land is too expensive for the school district to consider and would take up more of their funds than they are willing to spend.

So citizens of Gilroy, should someone ask you to sign your name on a sheet of paper, before you do, tell them to “show me,” just like in Missouri.

Challenge them to show you the data on why LAFCO’s plan is not smart growth and why theirs is. Don’t sign anything until you are fully informed of what you are being asked to sign. Inform yourself first. Otherwise, you and our city will suffer greatly from the unintended consequences of short sightedness.

Can you imagine? Anytime the school district needs land to build a new school, the city will need to spend \$100,000 just to put it on the ballot, not to mention land for any other needs for our community. What a fiasco!

Ron Kirkish is a retired semiconductor engineer and longtime Gilroy resident with two grown sons who attended Gilroy schools. He wrote this for the Dispatch.

Guest view: History supports city's SE Quad plan

Ann (Forestieri) Minton | Posted: Friday, February 26, 2016 7:19 pm

I grew up on a prune ranch on Fisher Avenue bought in the 1930s by my immigrant grandparents, Gataeno and Anna Forestieri. My first job was picking 10 boxes of prunes to buy a lunch box when starting kindergarten. The year was 1960.

My brother Steve and I worked summers, weekends and part-time jobs. My parents were adamant that farming was not a feasible career for us. Steve and I found other careers—an engineer and court reporter, respectively.

Morgan Hill is a town rich in history, and my father helped build that image and was appointed to the Federal Prune Administrative Committee by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland in 1980.

You must understand the past to see the future. The freeway placement, which my father Duke Forestieri fought, cut off our land to the west. Dad took on other people's orchards to make ends meet for our family. He also pursued the idea of moving to Yuba County where prune farming was beginning. My father's love of Morgan Hill instead kept him here. He continued to sharecrop but as Yuba County's production increased, it drove the price of prunes down everywhere—including in Morgan Hill.

The cost of farming escalated in the Valley, as more and more restrictions were enacted, utility costs increased, and labor for harvesting became harder to find even though my dad paid top dollar and provided free housing for the seasonal workers.

My dad's health began to spiral downward in his mid-70s. He gave up sharecropping and farmed only his land and the next door neighbor's..

The pioneer farmers did not have stock options or golden handshakes; they had their families and their land. Dad joined others in working with the city in the 90s and early 2000s to carve out a plan for the pioneer farmers and include the needs of a growing Morgan Hill. Before he died in 2011, this plan was taking shape and he told me, "It lets people enjoy using our land, not just looking at it as they drive by, but to walk on it, play on it".

This final plan has been worked on for over 15 years. It provides an area where kids who cannot afford traveling teams can improve their skills in many sports and have a better chance at the



Letters to the editor

coveted spots on the high school teams. It will provide a place for community sponsored events, where families can afford the tickets for the whole family.

If this cohesive plan is not put into place, landowners will go their own way, creating a haphazard tapestry for financial survival, which will not enrich our children's lives or improve the landscape.

I firmly support this plan for the SEQ.

Editor's note: The Southeast Quadrant/Sports-Recreation-Leisure Urban Service Area expansion plan will be considered for approval at the March 11 meeting of the Local Agency Formation Commission. For more information, visit morganhilltimes.com or santaclaralafco.org.

Guest view: LAFCO should reject SE Quad plan

Mark Grzan | Posted: Friday, February 26, 2016 7:22 pm

The City of Morgan Hill's plan to develop county farmland to preserve it lacks merit. It undermines broader regional efforts to enhance and protect productive farmlands throughout our valley. Dominated by financial self interests, the city has pushed forward a fiscally and environmentally irresponsible plan that will hasten the demise of local farming. With the impending effects of climate change, preserving our farmlands becomes crucial. This is why on March 11, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) must vote to deny the city's plan.



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The city is seeking LAFCO approval to annex 229 of acres of farmland in the county for commercial development to fund preservation. But the funding plan is flawed and grossly inadequate according to the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority and American Farmland Trust, and LAFCO concurs. The city has 45 years' worth of vacant commercial land within its current boundaries. It can use those lands and not develop any farmland at all.

As the city touts its preservation policies, it has declined to work with the OSA, the county and LAFCO to address concerns they have with the plan.

So what is the city's plan? There is no plan. There are few if any viable projects proposed for the lands to be annex. If LAFCO approves the city's request, the city can simply abandon the plan and rezone for commercial and residential use. There is no guarantee than any farmland will be preserved.

The city has proposed a terrible recipe for 21st century urban sprawl. It's greed, not need. And that puts our region at risk of losing an invaluable and finite resource, at risk of lowering our quality of life, at risk of damaging an important and valued economic industry in our valley. In fact, the county agricultural commissioner has recently reported, "The value per acre and the value per worker created by Santa Clara County agriculture has continued to increase and has never been higher."

Southern Santa Clara County contains the majority of farmlands in the county and their value cannot be understated. Our farmlands are utilized throughout the year. They are supported by a

unique groundwater basin. They are well suited to lessen the effects of climate change through carbon storage, water retention, flood protection, local food production, habitat and biodiversity.

The lands in question are county lands. While the cities have a part in protecting farmlands, it is the county that is in the best position to ensure a coordinated effort. The city's piecemeal plan undermines all farmland at the cusp of regional efforts to preserve.

Please add your voice to theirs and send an email to LAFCo before March 11th c/o Executive Director, Neelima.Palacherla@ceo.sccgov.org to urge LAFCo to deny the City's proposal.

Mark Grzan is a Morgan Hill resident and former City Councilmember.

Contra Costa Times

Danville: Battle continues over housing project's impact on cyclists

By [Sam Richards](#)

srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com

Posted: 02/29/2016 12:00:00 AM PST

DANVILLE -- The battle over whether cyclists' safety should be a bigger factor in approving plans for a 69-house housing tract off Diablo Road near the enclave of Diablo continues to simmer, as a key court decision about the tract's overall approvals in 2013 will wait a few weeks longer.

At issue is whether the town's approval three years ago of the Magee Ranch housing development should be rescinded because the environmental impact report failed to account for the project's effect on cyclists. Contra Costa County Superior Court Judge Barry Goode said Thursday he wanted more information before making a ruling; that hearing is scheduled for March 17 in Martinez.

The Danville Save Our Open Space citizens group sued the Danville Town Council over the 2013 EIR that greenlighted developer SummerHill's plans for houses on 38 acres of flat land adjacent to Diablo Road. This narrow, winding road, especially the 1¼-mile stretch between Green Valley Road and Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard, has become one of central Contra Costa's most popular routes for bicyclists, a gateway to Mount Diablo State Park.

"We're fighting to make sure a good job will be done on that (environmental impact) report and that bicyclists' safety will not be shortchanged," said Maryann Cella, a spokeswoman for the Danville Save Our Open Space group.

The Oakland-based group Bike East Bay and the California Bicycle Coalition, headquartered in Sacramento, have filed court briefs supporting Danville SOS's efforts to secure cyclists' safety if Magee Ranch is built.

Contra Costa County Superior Court Judge Steven Austin ruled in July that the council violated parts of the town's general plan, as well as state environmental law, by approving the project and its environmental report, which didn't sufficiently consider bicyclists' safety. Austin's ruling required the council not only to redo the environmental impact report but to rescind its approval of the entire project.

The town, working along with SummerHill, appealed Austin's ruling, and an appellate court ruled the EIR must be redone but that the 2013 project approvals could stand. Danville SOS is, in essence, asking Goode to reinstate Austin's ruling.

Danville Town Attorney Robert Ewing reiterated Friday the town's desire for Magee Ranch's 2013 approvals to remain in place while the environmental report is reworked.

"To have this one remaining issue halt things when the appellate decision said we properly approved the project itself ... it seems like a waste of resources to go back through the whole process again," Ewing said.

Cella disagrees, saying that if a project was approved with a faulty environmental report, the project approval itself is therefore faulty. She also believes the town's stance is based on its fear of a referendum election on the whole project. Such referendum petitions must be submitted within 30 days of the council's approval of the opposed action, and having to re-approve the housing plan could leave it vulnerable to a vote, said Cella, who strongly denied last week that her group's ultimate goal is to squash the Magee Ranch project completely.

Partnerships like the SummerHill/town of Danville one are fairly standard procedure in cases like this, Ewing said, and after Goode's expected ruling, he expects that the town and developer will once again defend their separate interests.

Cella asserts there's an inherent conflict in that partnership.

"It gives us grave concerns about their objectivity," she said. SummerHill, as a business, has no obligation to be objective and impartial, Cella said, while the town does.

Contact Sam Richards at 925-943-8241. Follow him at [Twitter.com/samrichardsWC](https://twitter.com/samrichardsWC).

Mercury News

Mark Grzan: Morgan Hill land annexation deadly for farming

By Mark Grzan

Special to the Mercury News

Posted: 03/01/2016 10:00:00 AM PST | Updated: about 15 hours ago

The city of Morgan Hill is proposing to annex and develop 229 acres of prime farmland in an area known as the Southeast Quadrant. The city claims this annexation will preserve farmland. The absurdity of the plan is matched by its lack of merit.

It will not protect farmland. It is classic urban sprawl, and it will be a long-term fiscal burden on the city and its taxpayers. This is why on March 11, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) must vote to deny the city's misguided plan.

Morgan Hill contends its new agricultural program -- a part of their plan -- will help compensate for farmland lost to development. Yet the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority and American Farmland Trust state that the plan lacks adequate funding to purchase farmland in an amount equal to the farmland that is lost. LAFCo's analysis confirms the plan has "serious deficiencies" and is "unreasonable" in its ability to generate sufficient funds to preserve farmland.

So why do city officials want to annex these farmlands? They claim they need the land for commercial development. But according to the city's own data, it has 45 years of vacant commercial land within its current boundaries. Clearly, it has plenty of undeveloped land within city limits yet has been unwilling to focus on infill development as requested by LAFCo, the Santa Clara County and the Open Space Authority.

Keep in mind that if LAFCo approves the city's request, the City Council can alter the zoning in the quadrant at any time. In fact, the city knew of recent negotiations between the local school district and landowners. Schools are not permitted under the proposed zoning, yet the city did nothing to stop these negotiations. This begs the question: What is the city's real plan for this area?

The plan is nothing more than a costly recipe for urban sprawl with no purpose. It will have important regional implications. It further erodes the things that enhance our quality of life: finite farmland resources that drive our valley's economically significant agricultural industry crucial environmental benefits that lessen the effects of climate change and, of course, rural viewsheds that improve our quality of life.

The effort is greed, not need.

In addition to the regional implications, there are local fiscal impacts. The LAFCo analysis determined that the city has not demonstrated that it has the ability to provide and fund services such as water, police and fire, to the quadrant without adversely affecting the current level of those services to residents.

This fiscally and environmentally irresponsible plan can only ensure the demise of farming in the area. It undermines broader regional efforts to enhance and support productive farmlands throughout our valley.

Preserving farmland is a regional, not a local, issue. While the cities have a part in protecting farmlands, it is the county that is in the best position to ensure a coordinated regional effort is in place to preserve these lands and help cities direct growth away from these important farmlands. This regional effort is on the cusp of taking flight and the city should engage in earnest in this process.

The current plan was devised between the city and landowners in the quadrant. The city limited public participation in its planning and decision-making process for these lands. Regardless, there is a growing number of organizations and citizens raising their voices in opposition.

Please add your voice and send an email to LAFCo (Neelima.Palacherla@ceo.sccgov.org) before March 11. Urge LAFCo to deny the Morgan Hill's annexation proposal.

Mark Grzan is a former Morgan Hill councilman and mayor pro tem. He wrote this for this newspaper.

Guest commentary: Federal Glover: Economic well-being of Contra Costa looks good but affordable housing market will get tighter

By Federal Glover

[Guest commentary](#)

Posted: 03/01/2016 11:36:55 AM PST | Updated: 23 min. ago

It is good to be a Californian. It's even better to be a resident of the San Francisco Bay Area ... if -- and that's a big "if" -- you are currently employed and already are making your monthly mortgage.

During the Board of Supervisors' annual retreat last month, we were given a report on the economic well being and forecast for the East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa counties) from Beacon Economics, a consulting firm that has kept its eye on the economy for years.

Our population continues to grow. Charting from 1970 to 2014, the graph shows almost a 45-degree angle indicating a rapid pace of growth.

If the trend continues, the Bay Area and Contra Costa can expect that growth to continue. Short of building a wall around the county and posting signs "Keep Out!" where all these new people will live is one of the biggest problems facing the county and the Bay Area.

One of the most worrisome predictions was: if you're rich, you're probably going to be richer; and if you're poor or a lower-income earner, you're probably going to have a harder time stretching your dollars to meet the rising living costs of the Bay Area. In other words, the gap between the rich and the poor will continue to widen.

Economically, the Bay Area is performing better than California. The state is also doing better than the rest of the nation. But there are pockets in the Bay Area where our improving economy still feels like a far away dream.

First the good news: The number of jobs continue to grow in both counties but at a slower pace than the tech-rich South Bay and San Francisco.

Unemployment has fallen to 4.8 percent. Most of the job growth has been in leisure and hospitality, professional and business services and the nonresidential construction.

A lot of the new jobs are coming from the movement of companies formerly located in San Francisco and the South Bay to the East Bay, which offers more affordable housing and office rentals.

Most noteworthy was the decision for Uber to move its headquarters to Oakland. Besides Uber, some of the new East Bay corporate neighbors include Sunset Magazine going to Jack London Square, Shaklee has combined its San Francisco and Hayward sites into a single locale in Pleasanton, and DelMonte is moving from the city to Walnut Creek. The impact of these corporate moves go beyond their specific fields. The new office workers will need housing and schools for their kids, the children will need new clothes and sneakers, families will enjoy being closer to the local food sources, young kids will need child care, many will probably need cars to get around our spread out communities and the offices will need to be cleaned and gardens need to be tended.

The benefits and the job creation of these corporate moves are endless and that will help spur our economy.

But there is also a dark side. The people who clean the offices, the gardeners who trim the shrubs and trees, the child care providers, the teachers, the uniformed men and women that will police our communities will need a place to live. There simply is not enough housing for them. Oh, the wealthy will always find a house that fits their income, but the workers who make up our middle class and the families just starting out don't have enough places to live.

Builders are not building enough starting-out residential units, whether they be townhomes, condos or smaller detached homes where some lower-income families can start investing their income in a home of their own that will put them on the first rung of the homeowners' ladder to bigger and more expensive homes.

Of the Bay Area counties, Contra Costa has the smallest number of permits for multifamily housing.

Despite complaints that government has grown too large, in Contra Costa the total number of government jobs -- that includes federal, state, county and city -- in 2014 is about the same number of jobs in 2000.

In 2000 we had 48,200 jobs; today we have 49,100 jobs.

The number manufacturing jobs have gone down, but the number of jobs has increased in leisure and hospitality jobs. It's important to note that the jobs in leisure and hospitality are low compared with the high-paying jobs in manufacturing, which in earlier years was enough to maintain a middle-class living style. Job trends show that leisure and hospitality employment has had the biggest increase and manufacturing had the smallest increase in the number of jobs.

All in all, the dollar will remain strong. In the years to come, we still are concerned about the state's water policy, the growing inequality, finding housing people can afford and maintaining and improving our infrastructure.

Supervisor Glover represents District 5 on the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors.