

Valley Viewpoints

The San Fernando Valley Section of The Times welcomes all viewpoints from readers about issues in the Valley. Letters should be as brief as possible and are subject to condensation. They must include signature, valid mailing address and telephone number, if any. Pseudonyms and initials will not be used. Send letters to: San Fernando Valley Editor, Los Angeles Times, Box 7457, Van Nuys, Calif. 91409.

Why Not a No-Growth Policy?

The article in the Valley Section entitled "Year 2000: Valley to Have Share of Growing Pains," (Jan. 6) presented a bleak future for the San Fernando Valley—a future where population will grow unchecked, where air pollution and traffic congestion increase, and where developers would like to "build more housing units than necessary in the next 20 years." Not once in the entire article did anyone, even the concerned environmentalists and city planners, mention the only possible solution to these ills—a policy of no-growth.

Why is it that "progress" for the Valley is inevitably viewed as depending upon the growth of the construction industry—that the Valley will stagnate unless we build more shopping centers, condominiums, office complexes and housing that only the rich can afford? Can anyone point out a single advantage of continued "urban sprawl" in this Valley? I can think of only one—that the "developers," those builders who make urban sprawl possible, will become richer.

Two "planners and developers" who were interviewed in last Sunday's article . . . Phillip Krakover and Jack Shine (who, not so coincidentally, work together, a fact not mentioned in the article) were quoted as saying that they are concerned about the current housing shortage. Krakover stated that the current community plans, which call for slower growth rates, are "a cop-out to political pressure and the power of neighborhood groups in the Valley, who don't want new housing or development." Shine claimed that "this community has obligations to future generations—not just to current residents."

What these two developers are saying is that the people who now live in this Valley do not have the right to stop further growth so that the quality of life in this area will be preserved. This philosophy may be fine for people such as Krakover and Shine, who can afford to move out of the Valley (assuming that they even live in it now) when the quality of life is overrun by condominiums. But what of the majority of the Valley residents, who cannot afford to move? What happens to the people mentioned by Jack Shine when he said, "At the rate of skyrocketing prices"? I have some shocking news for Shine—young people already cannot afford to buy housing in the Valley. My husband and I can barely afford to rent a house, located in Reseda, one of the areas that Director of City Planning Calvin Hamilton called "blocks of aging single-family homes in the Valley (which many developers feel) should give way to high-rise condominiums and townhouses."

I don't want to live in a condominium or townhouse. I prefer my low-density, aging, single-family home. I don't want to be surrounded by high-density housing and shopping centers. I feel that the Valley already has too many houses, people, and shopping centers. I believe that those of us who already live here have the right to deny newcomers an inalienable right to spoil this Valley. And I think that I am not alone in my beliefs, that most Valley residents would like to see an end to this senseless growth.

Why, then, the developers might ask, don't the Valley residents rise up and make these views known? I suggest that it is because our system of government does not allow for input from individual citizens, who, unlike the developers, have neither the time nor the vested financial interest to go to hearings (often located at City Hall, therefore inconvenient for Valley residents) or otherwise make their views known. This situation was brought forcibly home to me recently when, at a meeting with a local city councilperson where we were trying to present a case for a state park at Lower Bell Canyon in Canoga Park, I was told by the councilperson that we really couldn't discuss this issue because the land in question was not yet within this councilperson's district (although it had been voted for annexation by the city). This councilperson had, however, been able to find time for "several meetings" to discuss the issue with the developer, who wants to put 290 single-family homes on this land. I find myself thinking that a mockery of democracy is happening here, when politicians will only listen to the people who have money and power.

This same councilperson recently came out against condominium development next to Pierce College, but was quoted as saying that, "in my experience, the developer eventually wins." That this is true was illustrated a few months ago by Jack Shine and Phillip Krakover who, while building a high-rise "garden office complex" on Ventura Blvd. just east of Balboa Blvd., managed to bulldoze away the remains of the Indian Village of Encino and the foundations of one of the earliest stage coach stops in the San Fernando Valley. I am unhappy to report that this was done legally and with the help of an archaeologist from outside of Los Angeles County, as archaeology is also my profession. When several archaeological groups with research interests in the San Fernando Valley took this case to the City Council, we were told that it was an "archaeological problem" which the City Council did not have the knowledge or expertise to be able to deal with.

Instead of pushing for more high-density housing, shopping centers, and office complexes, I believe that we should look for "Progress" in the Valley in other areas, such as the quality of life mentioned in the Times article. Construction should be confined to renovating run-down areas and revitalizing sections such as Van Nuys, as mentioned by Calvin Hamilton. What little vacant land is left in the Valley should be used for parks (in which the Valley is notoriously poor), museums, cultural centers, recreation, and other activities which will increase the quality of life, which in my opinion is sorely lacking in the Valley at present.

The Valley residents and city planners must decide what we would like the Valley to be like in 20 years. We must not let developers . . . cover every square inch of this Valley with concrete. I have seen Los Angeles grow, every year, into a place in which I am ashamed to have had a part in its development.

What are we going to tell our children and grandchildren, 20 years from now, when they ask what happened to the mountains, to the oak trees, to the streams, and to our natural and cultural heritage? Are we going to tell them that we felt that those things were insignificant when weighed against creating jobs within an area already overpopulated by building homes for more people at prices only beneficial to the developer?

How much will the \$250,000 houses be worth when all the eye can see is more houses? This is the future our descendants have to look forward to—let's leave them something of real value.

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