

## **MOORPARK VOTERS REJECT SPRAWL—NOT ALL GROWTH**

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Congratulations, people of Moorpark. I salute you, once again! I am so proud of your efforts leading up to and culminating in a historic vote February 28. "We the people," on both sides of the issue, were engaged in a spirited debate that makes us a stronger community. As always, sincere people can (and do) disagree. Husbands and wives can disagree and dear friends sometimes disagree also. We saw both during the North Park debate. But disagreements need not lead to the loss of friendships or to continued contentiousness in our daily lives. Let's remember that while we have had our disagreements over this issue, we are still one community who cares deeply for our fair city of Moorpark. It's time to come together again and accept the results. Our community is a winner because of all the welcome and heartfelt participation on both sides of the issue. This was and is all part of the democratic process that makes our country so great.

By more than a 3 to 1 margin, in a high-turnout special election, voters resoundingly defeated the North Park urban sprawl housing project, thereby defending the Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) growth boundaries passed by voters in 1999, and keeping local control local. This means that our city, the fastest growing city in Ventura County, can grow sensibly from within rather than grow too fast via urban sprawl.

Yes, I said it was a *high-turnout* election, and it was—contrary to the *Star* editorial staff's puzzling assertions on March 4th. Now that the final numbers are in, 48.8%, or 8,085 of Moorpark's registered voters cast ballots regarding the North Park housing project. That is impressive and a tribute to all Moorpark voters who voted. According to official Ventura County election figures, it is interesting to note that more people (and the same or a higher percentage of registered voters) voted in this special election for this ONE local issue than voted in each of these *statewide* elections: the March 2, 2004 Presidential Primary, the March 5, 2002 Gubernatorial Primary and the November 5, 2000 Gubernatorial General Election. For example, 5,629 people or 37.6% of registered Moorpark voters voted in the March 2002 election. This is the same election during which voters (1) passed Measure R, the Moorpark Unified School District Bond measure and (2) last re-elected 4<sup>th</sup> District Supervisor Judy Mikels.

Furthermore, when comparing to other Moorpark special elections, the turnout numbers are even more impressive. More people (and a higher percentage of registered voters) voted in the North Park special election than voted in each of these previous Moorpark special elections: the January 12, 1999 election, when we passed SOAR and defeated Hidden Creek, the prior version of North Park, both by 2 to 1 margins (5,321 voters or 32.29% of registered voters); and, the July 20, 1999 election, when Moorpark elected Mindy Yaras to fill a vacant seat on the Moorpark Unified School Board (1,972 voters or 12.93% of registered voters).

I believe people were energized by the fact that SOAR gave Moorpark citizens local control to decide this issue, they welcomed that control, and chose to keep their local control, by saying no. While we did not have the turnout of a national presidential election, I don't think you can expect that from a special election. The special election turnout was rather outstanding with 2,644 more people voting no this time (6,099 total no votes or 75%) and 174 more people voting yes (1,986 total yes votes or 25%) than when we defeated Hidden Creek in 1999.

It was easy to see that the developer, with weekly full page color newspaper ads, and seemingly endless color mailers was spending a lot more money than the local opposition, who relied more on shoe leather and neighbor to neighbor personal contact. The submitted Fair Political Practices Commission reports by both sides through the last reporting date (February 11<sup>th</sup>) showed \$551,891 spent by North Park and less than \$30,000 by two local opposition groups. I think everyone sorted through the fact and fiction, followed the money, and voted for sensible, but not excessive growth for Moorpark.

Since 1998, the year when the county-wide SOAR was passed, Moorpark has increased its housing stock by 15%, adding some 1,324 new dwelling units<sup>1</sup>, mostly single family homes, and earning the title of "fastest growing city in Ventura County." With 2,500+ additional homes either already approved or slated for approval within our existing growth boundary between now and the city's planned 2010 buildout, that will be a 24% growth rate after 2005 (without North Park) or cumulative 39% since 1998. If we had approved North Park, our growth rate after 2005 would have been 41% instead of 24% (and cumulative 56% since 1998). Or, if we had added the 1,680 North Park units to the 2500 already in the pipeline, it would have been 67% more housing units than our General Plan would have allowed—all within the same time frame! I think that voters realized that whatever the benefits, such benefits (from North Park) could not outweigh the negatives of too much growth too fast before infrastructure improvements could catch up.

Many who might otherwise favor the project clearly voted no. Some told me they could not understand why the developer came back so soon with a proposal like this, after such a stinging defeat in 1999, and before we had completed our General Plan buildout. No sooner did they lose in 1999 than they were right back with a new proposal almost immediately. While it had fewer units, it inexplicably had more grading than the defeated Hidden Creek, yet the developer remained unwilling to reduce the development footprint in any substantial way. It appears that the developer dared us to vote no again, and we did.

As Scott Pozza of the Moorpark Planning Commission said in his January 22, 2006 *Star* essay: "A more rational approach is to concentrate on developing our city in accordance with our approved General Plan and construct the infrastructure needed to support that growth before we consider anything else." It is my hope that we will now do that, for the betterment of our entire city.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from California Department of Finance Housing and Population figures

Finally, let me publicly thank all those who actively participated in the election campaign, as volunteers (for either side). It is by participating and sharing views publicly and constructively that we become an informed public on important issues such as this.

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves;  
and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome  
discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

*Thomas Jefferson (1820)*

By the end of the campaign, both proponents and opponents informed the discretion of the voters by education. We will all now live in harmony with the result.

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