

To: Lisa Mascaro, Ventura County Bureau Chief, Simi Valley Edition of the Daily News
From: Roseann Mikos, Ph.D., Moorpark—529-4828)
RE: Rebuttal to Guest Columnist Jon Haines' essay of 8/28/99....
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Sore Loser Ignores Facts

September 7, 1999
By: ROSEANN MIKOS

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Many thanks to Jon Haines for his sour grapes essay: "SOAR initiatives have handcuffed our cities" (Simi Valley Daily News, August 28, 1999). His remarks clearly show Jane and John Q. Public that he doesn't understand what the voters approved almost eight and ten months ago in Moorpark and in the rest of the county, respectively, when they passed the Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) initiatives. The voters were not fooled in November or January by the kind of misinformation, sprinkled with occasional grains of truth, that is rampant in Haines' essay. And the public won't be fooled now either.

Haines' wants you to believe that he knows better than two out of every three voters, who voted for SOAR. He wants you to believe you made a mistake, so he resurrected much of the old anti-SOAR rhetoric that you rejected in the two elections, hoping you'll believe it this time. Then he added a few more new inaccuracies. It's not very likely that the public will be gullible enough to believe the inaccuracies. Nice try, Mr. Haines.

Example #1. Haines says about the passage of SOAR: "By putting up the no-growth gates around Ventura County all we have done is make it impossible for our children to own a house in the community where they grew up." Wrong. Just take a look at the figures for the already planned growth in Ventura County's cities and in the unincorporated county till 2020. There are no less than 60,280 new housing starts planned that are NOT subject to SOAR's voter approval requirement. Assuming they all get built by 2020, that's another 185,000 people! Who would call that "no-growth?" Jon Haines did. Would you? I doubt it.

Of the 60,280 housing starts, some 4,280 are projected in Moorpark, where I live. For Moorpark, this will generate a 48% increase in population to fill the new homes. How is that "no-growth?" Of course, it's not. Rather, it is substantial growth. But Haines and his anti-SOAR cronies aren't satisfied with a 48% growth rate in Moorpark. No, he wanted to allow Messenger's Hidden Creek proposal too, to give Moorpark 3,221 more houses—so we'd have a staggering 86% growth rate by 2020.

Thankfully, Moorpark voters knew that a 48% growth rate was plenty to guarantee room for our children and grandchildren and many others. And they also knew that 86% was too much too soon, so they voted for SOAR and against Hidden Creek. Allowing a 48% growth rate is not following the "last man closes the gate" theory! I guess Haines didn't want to confuse his negative message with the facts to refute it.

Example #2. Haines says, "they (Messenger Development) spent 15 years going through all the necessary state, county, city planning and council approvals to go ahead and start development. But with the passage of SOAR by Moorpark voters in January, they are now left with the investment (\$1.5M supposedly) but no way to capitalize on it." Pardon me, while I get out my violin to serenade the poor speculative developer who didn't get his way.

Haines' remarks suggest that he believes developers should be allowed to go through the motions of the public process and get automatic "Yes" votes from any city or the county, no matter what they propose to do, and no matter where or how they propose to do it. Well, guess what? California law allows city councilpersons, county supervisors, and yes—even the public—to vote NO, if they believe that sometimes a developer has to take "No" for an answer—because of an inappropriate project! That's what happened in Moorpark—when the citizens overturned the Hidden Creek development deal decision via a fair and legal referendum—all as part of the approval process.

If the only criteria for getting development approval were submitting a proposal and investing your own money, then there would be no rules to protect the public interest and there would be no public process to ensure following the law. Automatic wink and nod "yes" votes to all urban development have no place in our government. Judge Hutchins' August 20th ruling to overturn the Hidden Creek annexation to Moorpark underscored that principle. No government entity should abuse its discretion by not following the law during its decision-making process for proposed projects seeking approvals. Yet that is just what happened with the Hidden Creek project. So, not only did the people of Moorpark say no to Hidden Creek in an election. A judge also said no to the Hidden Creek annexation, in a courtroom. Messenger never had, and still does not have valid approval to do any development in Hidden Creek. That's a fact.

Example #3. Haines criticizes Richard Francis, SOAR's attorney, for trying to make sure that a church group who wants to build on farmland has clearly defined their project before it goes on the ballot. Haines claimed the church's plans were "already approved by the appropriate city agencies." Not so. The plans were not even submitted to the city, let alone scrutinized in the normal city process, as you would expect. So the Ventura city council never got to vote on the church's plans to put them on the ballot. If such due diligence scrutiny had occurred, the project would have been well-defined and there would be no need to challenge it now. Nor would the church need to gather any signatures, because the council would have placed it on the ballot for them.

"Closing the gates to the county?" Handcuffing our cities?" No, SOAR did not, has not, and cannot do such things. Having Haines tell you that SOAR stopped all growth or handcuffed our cities doesn't make either statement true. And they're not true.

The reality is that Haines, the president-elect of the Simi Valley-Moorpark Association of Realtors, gives only lip service to promoting managed, sustained growth, while he argues against SOAR, the very thing that gives us the best chance to have that managed growth. Do you think he has a vested interest in uncontrolled building? Nahhhh, of course not.

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