

## 60,280 Housing Starts Don't Equal "No Growth"

Sunday, September 5, 1999

By ROSEANN MIKOS

(NOTE: An edited version of this was published by the Los Angeles Times. Copyright 1999, Los Angeles Times. Reprinted by permission.)

RE: Jon Haines' essay "SOAR Closes Gate to Development" (Times, August 28, 1999). Here we go again. More sour grapes from a sore loser, who doesn't want to accept who won the elections last January (in Moorpark) and November (in the rest of the county). The super majority of voters who passed SOAR by a better than 2 to 1 margin knew when they voted for SOAR that there's plenty of room to grow throughout Ventura County in areas that do not require voter approval through SOAR. If Haines doesn't know that, as president-elect of the Simi Valley-Moorpark Association of Realtors, he must have his head in the sand.

In fact, checks with planning departments county-wide reveal some 60,280 expected new housing starts by 2020 in the cities and the unincorporated areas, none of which will be subject to SOAR. How Haines can call that "putting up the no-growth gates around Ventura County," I will never understand. It's obvious that Haines must not want the facts to get in the way of his negative message to slam SOAR. 60,280 housing starts represents a growth rate of between 17% and 48% depending on which city or county jurisdiction you examine.

Let's look at Moorpark, as the best example of how wrong Haines is. He and his anti-SOAR cronies aren't satisfied with a 48% growth rate, worth 4,280 new housing starts that are not subject to SOAR between Dec. 1998 and 2020. No, he wanted to allow Messenger's Hidden Creek too, to give Moorpark 3,221 more houses—so we'd have a staggering 86% growth rate by 2020. Moorpark voters knew that a 48% growth rate was plenty to guarantee room for our children and grandchildren and many others. But they also knew that 86% was too much too soon, so they voted for SOAR and against Hidden Creek. Allowing a 48% growth rate could hardly be called "closing the gate to development."

Haines would also have you believe that Messenger got all the valid approvals necessary for their Hidden Creek project and that Moorpark voters who passed SOAR are taking away Messenger's "vested right to build." Not true again. Messenger never had, and still does not have a valid or vested right to build any development in Hidden Creek. That's a fact.

Haines' seems to believe that 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.

Elsewhere in his essay, Haines criticizes Richard Francis, SOAR's attorney, for trying to make sure that a Ventura 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. 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 Ventura council would have placed it on the ballot for them.

There's not room in this column to refute every nugget of misinformation put forth by Haines. But you get the idea. "Closing the gate to development?" 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 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. After all, he's only in the real estate business.

*Roseann Mikos, Ph.D. is an 18-year Moorpark resident, is President of the Moorpark Branch of the Environmental Coalition, and is co-author of the Moorpark S.O.A.R. initiative. She can be reached at [contactme@roseann-mikos.org](mailto:contactme@roseann-mikos.org).*