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Project's negative impacts outweigh positive

By Roseann Mikos

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Opponents and proponents of the North Park housing project can probably agree on at least two things:

1. There are both negative impacts and positive benefits to the proposed North Park plan.
2. Moorpark should have wise growth that doesn't exacerbate runaway housing costs and doesn't completely "shut the gates" to future development.

Our disagreements center around interpretations of those very same things and what we think they mean for Moorpark and its residents.

Project opponents, myself included, feel strongly that the negative impacts far outweigh the benefits of the project and that growth that sprawls outside our voter-approved SOAR urban growth boundary (which this project would do, if built) is not wise growth at all.

In fact, allowing growth in a nongrowth open space area (North Park) will detract from the appropriate growth inside the city where growth belongs, is planned, should happen, is happening and will continue to happen -- to the tune of some 2,500-plus additional homes. With 2,500-plus homes either under construction, approved but not yet built, or slated for approval according to our approved general plan, we are clearly not shutting the gates to Moorpark.

We need to assimilate this planned inside-the-city growth and see how we handle it before we ever consider converting more open space and farmland (outside the city) to urban use.

Say no to unbridled urban sprawl

Saying no to North Park does not shut the gates to sensible growth. Rather, it says no to unbridled urban sprawl that favors ultra-high-end housing at the expense of the quality of life of the rest of the community. It says no to a leap-frog urban-sprawl development that is exactly the kind of development against which the Moorpark SOAR was intended to protect us!

Building 1,500 market-rate homes that will likely cost upward of \$1.7 million for an "average" home, similar to the homes at Country Club Estates, will not provide the homes for most residents' children and grandchildren that everyone says they want. There is nothing wrong with having some ultra-high-end homes in our city, but adding a new minicity full of them is excessive, especially when we have to destroy pristine hillsides to build them.

Make no mistake, contrary to what the developer's slick full-page weekly ads say, we maintain local control by voting no on North Park (not by voting yes).

Why am I voting no on North Park? Let me count some of the reasons.

1. The project, if approved, would remove almost 1,400 acres of open space from SOAR-protected local control, allowing urbanization where it is not now allowed. This is an area as large as all of the Mountain Meadows, Peach Hill and Steeple Hill neighborhoods combined!

2. The studies admit to seven significant unavoidable detrimental environmental impacts that cannot be mitigated, if this project is built as proposed:

-- Traffic impacts on Highway 118 and Highway 23.

-- Intersection impacts for Spring Road at High Street.

-- Loss of open-space visual resources, including scenic viewsheds from multiple viewpoints.

- Topographical/land-use changes that will change the visual character of the site.
- Increased night lighting (light pollution).
- Loss of biological resources especially, including loss of wildlife habitat for raptor species.
- Loss of "Farmland of Local Importance" and grazing land.

Section 15042 of the California Environmental Quality Act guidelines, part of California law, state clearly that a city "may disapprove a project if necessary in order to avoid one or more significant effects on the environment that would occur if the project were approved as proposed." (That means that the law says it is OK to say no!)

3. The North Park project is really bigger (not smaller) than its defeated cousin (Hidden Creek) for the same location. Hidden Creek was rejected by Moorpark voters in 1999 by a margin of 2-to-1. Hidden Creek, proposed by the same developer (using a different name), may have had more homes, but North Park has even more grading than Hidden Creek (by nearly 2 million cubic yards of dirt).

Hillside ordinance violated

If approved, the Orange County developer will tear down hillsides and fill in canyons to flatten the topography, moving more than 27 million cubic yards of dirt overall! I can't in good conscience vote to allow them to violate our hillside ordinance like that, and add to valley fever concerns, just so they can change the topography of the land to make their \$3 billion project work for them.

During the review process, I asked specifically what kind of project they could do for us that would not violate our hillside ordinance. The answer was that they would not have a project because they couldn't do what they want unless they violate our hillside standards and fill in those beautiful canyons.

4. The proposed lake will be filled with drinking water from the State Water Project because it would be unhealthy to use reclaimed water for it. The amount of water that will evaporate from the lake each year is enough water for as many as 600 families or for more than 100 acres of lemons or oranges, according to testimony from the Fox Canyon Ground Water Management Agency.

It is simply not good public policy to use badly needed drinking water like this for a recreational lake in a semi-arid, desert-like climate when our water supply is constantly being stretched to the limit.

Studies said they have enough water to supply North Park, but that was before Hurricane Katrina happened. That disaster highlighted weaknesses in our own state water system, the source of supply for North Park. Don Kendall, head of the Calleguas Municipal Water District, who distributes water locally, was quoted by Star columnist John Krist on Sept. 10: "If levee failures (in the Bay Delta) and flooding shut down the pumps that send water south, Calleguas would be able to draw enough water from storage underground or in nearby reservoirs to last (only) five or six months." Other reports suggest that there is a three in four chance that such failures will happen in the next 20 years. I am not convinced that there is enough water for the North Park population, let alone the lake, if this project is approved, given these recent revelations.

5. The city will only get 3.3 cents out of every property tax dollar paid by new North Park residents for city services, instead of the 7.4 cents we get for homes in our existing incorporated city -- less than half.

To try to make up for this shortfall, each North Park homeowner will be charged a one-time fee of about \$30,000 or more to be put into an "endowment" fund for future city expenses there. They will pay this on top of regular property tax amounts. This number was generated by trying to estimate how much money would be needed -- forever -- to make up for the lost tax revenue to Moorpark.

Don't ignore drawbacks

Frankly, I do not think it is humanly possible for anyone to accurately estimate how much money would be needed to fill this property tax gap, for all time! Who would have thought that construction costs in less than five years would escalate over 40 percent? Yet that is just what happened, limiting improvements to local schools and colleges that passed bond measures just a few years ago. So much for long-term cost estimation.

There are many more reasons for voting no, especially the added traffic that I have barely discussed, but there are some others I want us all to think about before we vote. I don't think we can ignore these or other reasons for voting no just because the houses will be glamorous, the lake will be fun, the unbuildable steepest hills will become a nature preserve,

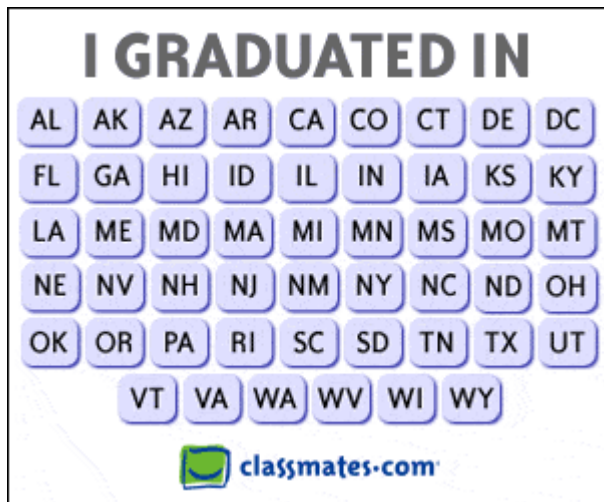
and the parks might have some ball fields that everybody wants.

The proponents will tell you more about these benefits, but you need to know both sides. I think that if you really weigh both sides, more of you will agree that the bad outweighs the good.

The North Park decision is in your hands, my fellow Moorpark residents. Please join me in voting no on North Park (Measure A6). Our future quality of life depends on it.

-- Roseann Mikos, Ph.D., is mayor pro tem of Moorpark and coauthor of Moorpark SOAR.

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