

## SOAR Didn't Close the Gate on All Growth

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By: ROSEANN MIKOS

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Gee! It took Jon Haines almost eight months after Moorpark's January 1999 election and almost ten months after the general election in November 1998 to come forward so publicly with his personal view about the Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) initiatives. Nice timing.

Haines' August 28th *Star* essay: "SOAR has turned county into a giant gated community" mimics the unfounded rhetoric from the anti-SOAR minority who lost both elections by a whopping 2 to 1 margin. He even got his essay published in all three local newspapers on the same day. How prolific! —And how many sour grapes?!

It's too bad he didn't base his comments on the facts about SOAR, about how many housing starts **are allowed** under SOAR without a public vote, and about California law. But, why should we expect him to do that? If he had, he couldn't slam SOAR and the public for passing it. As the president-elect of the Simi Valley-Moorpark Board of Realtors, we can only assume that he had their blessing in making his remarks. To be honest, I expect that many realtors cringed when they read his inflammatory and often erroneous comments.

Haines and his anti-SOAR cronies aren't satisfied with a 48% growth rate, worth 4,280 new housing starts between Dec. 1998 and 2020—in Moorpark alone. No, he wanted to allow 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 new people."

In the rest of the county, 56,000 more housing starts already allowed by the various cities' and the county's general plans between now and 2020, and **not** subject to SOAR, are still not enough for Haines. Those 56,000 new housing starts, over and above the 4,280 in Moorpark, represent a 17-32% growth rate, depending on the particular jurisdiction considered.

Most businesses would be happy with a 17-48% growth rate and would not be greedy for more, at the expense of their existing customers. But not Haines. He wants more. It's hard for average people (Haines' customers) to be sad for Haines and the real estate industry—to have to settle for **ONLY** a 17-48% growth rate!

"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 doesn't make it true. And it's not true.

The reality is: Haines doesn't want reasonable growth like the SOAR supporters voted to have. He wants to ignore the general plans in place and open the floodgates, so that the cities can be inundated with more growth than they can handle, all in the same time frame. To him, that's what "going through all the necessary state, county, city planning and council approvals to go ahead and start development" means.

Haines seems to believe that developers should be able to just 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!

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' recent 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.

The people of Ventura County were tired of too much wink and nod "Yes to any development" government. They voted in six cities and in the unincorporated county to require that each jurisdiction follow its general plan for development and get a vote of the people for most major deviations from that plan.

As for exemptions from SOAR, for potential government agencies' projects? This was no secret during the election campaigns and it is a requirement of state law. The SOAR initiatives simply and openly acknowledged the existing state law for such potential government proposals. Don't criticize SOAR for following State law. That's what you're supposed to do, even if you don't like the law!

No, we SOAR supporters, leaders and followers alike, are not practicing old Soviet Union style totalitarianism, as Haines suggests. Rather, we are a fine example of democracy in action and I am proud to be a part of it.

*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 [rmikos@bigplanet.com](mailto:rmikos@bigplanet.com).*