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## Important City Planning Decisions Loom

Should Santa Barbara embrace a future of “smart growth” in which development occurs in perhaps a score of “uban villages” with perhaps 100 or more new three-and four-story congregate mixed -use projects, connected by bus routes?

This is the future strongly favored by members of the City Council and by the city planning and transportation staff.

At 6pm today and Wednesday, the city will hold public hearings at the Faulkner Gallery in the downtown public library to consider our community’s future.

Santa Barbara’s historic emphasis on limited growth and its small-town feeling and character would be lost to a metropolitan view. Almost all new development would be multi-story, dense, congregate — and just plain big.

Even three projects a year like the Chapala Street projects would, over the next 30 years, transform Santa Barbara. Our small town would be lost forever as it turns into a big city.

Members of city staff favor a massive upzoning from the historical 40,005 units allowed, which was based on a vote of the people to limit growth in the city. Staff makes no bones about in the planning documents it prepares:

Tall, dense buildings are to be encouraged, and they are almost the only development to be encouraged.

Santa Barbara’s historical development would be socially re-engineered such that development no longer would be characterized by single-family residences surrounding a commercial district, but by mixed-use commercial residential development in the many urban villages in the city, typified by two- and three-story apartments above new commercial development.

Because commercial development provides sales-tax revenue, it would be encouraged. Some members of the City Council and staff may favor as many as 10,000 units more in the city than the 40,005 figure. The city’s population could grow from its current 90,000 to 120,000 or more. Three- and four-story bulky projects would characterize development throughout the city in the dense urban villages.

The irony is that perhaps the biggest building boom in Santa Barbara’s history would be undertaken in the name of “sustainability.” The “big city” future for Santa Barbara advocated by planning and transportation staff is based on the misconceived notion that people will give up their cars and the personal mobility they provide.

There is, to be clear, little that is more important than addressing environmental issues.

This will not be accomplished through turning Santa Barbara into a big city, with much public transportation. Rather, in time, technology will provide the answer, through electricity or hydrogen, to the air pollution that cars now cause.

To plan Santa Barbara’s future on the basis that people will give up their cars and begin to take the bus in droves would be an unwise, historic and costly mistake.

The new approach to Santa Barbara’s development favored by the city Council and staff may come to a head in the next few weeks, as the group Save El Pueblo Viejo submits its petitions to the city to place a charter amendment on the ballot that would lower building height maximums in El Pueblo Viejo to 40 feet and in the rest of the city to 45 feet.

An interim ordinance to stave off the Save El Pueblo Viejo charger amendment was sent to the city council's ordinance committee in April, and it is now considered likely that it will return to the council in August just as the Save El Pueblo petitions are being submitted, but before they have been counted.

The proposed interim ordinance would be an exercise in public disinformation and duplicity. Exceptions would include public-benefit projects and affordable housing.

The Plan Santa Barbara process is at loggerheads with the traditional slow-growth and preservation attitudes of the people. The people, partly in response, are attempting to place an initiative on the ballot that would control and limit heights. City Council members and staff, in turn, are pushing for a fake interim ordinance limiting heights in a much less restrictive way that would allow them to implement their high-density, high-growth development future.

It is time for Santa Barbarans to stand firm for the traditional limits to and controls on growth that characterize our fair town. As the credo of the Courthouse says: "God gave us the country. The skill of man hath built the town."

This will require involvement in the Plan Santa Barbara process and support of the El Pueblo Viejo initiative.

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