

West Ming project OK'd despite staff objections

BY JAMES GELUSO, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, June 13, 2007

The Kern County Board of Supervisors Tuesday gave a thumbs-up to Castle and Cooke's planned West Ming project, overruling the county's planning staff.

The planning department had recommended that the supervisors ask the city of Bakersfield to require changes in the subdivision. The department wanted to see more open space at the northern end of the development, near the Kern River.

But Castle and Cooke argued that the development will actually provide more open and public space near the river than is allowed by the current use of the land, a farm. Roger McIntosh, a consultant working for the developer, told supervisors that the subdivision will include trails and linear parks.

"If you look at it as a whole, I think it's an improvement," said Supervisor Ray Watson.

The West Ming project, a 3.4-square-mile, 7,500-home development, includes 432 acres between the Kern River Canal and the Kern River. That land is part of the Kern River Plan Element, a joint city-county plan adopted in 1985. The plan requires the city to ask for the county's input before taking the land out of the Kern River Plan Element and putting it into the West Ming Plan.

The supervisors instructed staff to give that input in the form of a letter supporting the removal of the land.

"I think it'd be a wonderful place to live," said Supervisor Mike Maggard.

Cilion

The supervisors reluctantly agreed to force a planned corn-to-ethanol plant to undergo a full environmental investigation.

Cilion's planned 55 million-gallon-a-year ethanol plant near Famoso Road and Highway 99 has the support of the supervisors, but they said they were concerned the plant would be delayed even longer if a court ruled the supervisors were wrong in not requiring the report.

"I believe this plant will be up and running quicker by doing an environmental impact report," said Supervisor Jon McQuiston.

"To say the least, we are disappointed with the recommendation from county staff today," said Cilion President Jeremy Wilhelm. He said 150 workers building the plant will be put out of work by the requirement. But he also vowed that the company would eventually get the plant built.

County planners said the report is needed to answer concerns raised by Fresno attorney Richard Harriman, the same man who successfully challenged the environmental work on two stalled Wal-Mart supercenters in Bakersfield.

Human Services

Come September, Kern County Human Services will be open five days a week, after the supervisors approved the change in hours.

"I think it's time we consider serving the public 100 percent instead of 80 percent," said Supervisor Ray Watson.

The department's 10 offices have been closed to the public on Fridays since 2002. Workers still worked on Fridays, but they used the time to catch up on paperwork so they wouldn't miss deadlines, said Fred Plane, the county's senior deputy administrative officer.

The department will be open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday beginning in September. Currently, the office is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

In other action, supervisors:

- Approved referring Pine Mountain Club's emergency service needs to the Local Agency Formation Commission. The commission will consider whether to allow money that had been collected for a sewer system to be spent for improvements to a planned fire station. If the commission agrees, the issue will be placed on the ballot likely early next year. Also on the ballot, in a separate issue, would be a tax levy of about \$125 a parcel to pay for expanded ambulance service. The issue drew heat, with 19 speakers on the issue, followed by an hourlong discussion among the supervisors and county staff.
- Approved making the first of two payments to pay back the cost of a ladder truck. The La Paloma power plant had fronted the county the \$1.5 million cost of a ladder truck and the first year's staffing costs back in 1999, said county Fire Chief Dennis Thompson. The county agreed to pay back the money once the property taxes from La Paloma and three neighboring power plants exceeded the costs of maintaining the fire station. The county is budgeting the remainder next year, Thompson said.

Universities pledge to go 'climate neutral'

More than 280 institutions nationwide, including 37 in California, vow to conserve energy and cut greenhouse emissions.

By Richard C. Paddock, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Wed., June 13, 2007

SAN FRANCISCO — The presidents and chancellors of 284 colleges and universities nationwide have signed a pact to combat global warming by making their campuses "carbon neutral" as soon as possible, leaders of the initiative announced Tuesday.

The institutions pledged to carry out short-term strategies to conserve energy and reduce emissions while they develop long-term plans to convert their facilities so that they would no longer produce greenhouse gases, which contribute to global warming.

Advocates said the colleges and universities were the first sector of society to make such a vow. Signatories included community colleges and Ivy League universities; the largest institution on the list is the University of California, with its 10 campuses.

"Global warming is a defining challenge of our time," said Arizona State University President Michael Crow, a leader of the climate campaign. "Colleges and universities must lead the effort to reverse global warming for the health and well-being of current and future generations," Crow said.

The institutions that signed the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment agreed that they would within two years devise an action plan and a target date for making their campuses "climate neutral." For most institutions, the transformation will take decades.

Interim actions include adopting green building standards for all construction, purchasing only energy-efficient products, using renewable energy, expanding public transportation and agreeing to offset the carbon emissions from aircraft travel by university employees.

The schools also agreed to increase research into ways to achieve climate neutrality.

The institutions must make their plans and periodic progress reports public so that students, in particular, can monitor their progress.

"This is no small feat," Crow said at a Washington, D.C., news conference. "This is actually a restructuring of how universities work."

At some campuses, none of the existing buildings meet green standards and would need to be remodeled or replaced. At other schools, transitioning from students' use of cars on campuses to

nonpolluting public transportation may be the biggest challenge.

Of the 284 institutions nationwide that signed the pact, 37 are in California, including Pitzer College, Cal Poly Pomona and all nine campuses of the Los Angeles Community College district.

Absent from the list were some of the nation's wealthiest universities, including Harvard, Stanford, Princeton and Yale.

Organizers said they hoped to enlist 1,000 institutions by 2009.

The presidents and chancellors wrote in the pledge that they were "deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale and speed of global warming" and that they accepted the scientific consensus that the change in climate was being caused largely by humans.

"We further recognize the need to reduce the global emission of greenhouse gases by 80% by midcentury at the latest," the signatories said, "in order to avert the worst impacts of global warming and to reestablish the more stable climatic conditions that have made human progress over the last 10,000 years possible."

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, Wednesday, June 13, 2007:](#)

Visalia plans parking ... yet again

Not surprisingly for a place with a rapidly growing population in a finite amount of space, Topic A in nearly every discussion about planning for Visalia is: parking.

Discussions about downtown Visalia rarely get beyond the first sentence without someone invoking the P word. Parking has become a point of contention in discussion about the East Downtown Strategic Plan.

Whether it is truck parking, event parking, in lieu parking, parking enforcement, parking garages or other variants, sooner or later conversation turns to where we will put our cars.

Parking is no doubt of critical importance to our community. But most people's thinking about parking begins and ends with one thought: We need more of it.

Well, Visalia probably will need more parking. But it also needs to think differently about parking, about how we get around and about what we consider convenient parking.

Again on Monday, Visalia's favorite obsession was the subject of discussion at a number of public meetings.

A consultant group, Progressive Urban Management Associates, conducted a series of workshops with civic, business and government leaders seeking their thoughts about the future of downtown. Guess which issue was mentioned most?

Later that evening, the city of Visalia introduced a panel of nine people representing a cross section of Visalia's civic and business community. The task before them: Examine downtown parking and come up with some strategies for improving parking.

Maybe no other issue in Visalia receives the attention that parking does, especially for downtown.

Curiously, the city's new attention to parking comes on the heels of a couple of major initiatives that have created more parking spaces in downtown Visalia than ever before.

The city has spent the past several years in generating more downtown parking by creating more diagonal spaces. Most famously, it has installed angled parking along Center Avenue in the past year.

This spring, the city opened a five-level, 700-space downtown parking garage on Acequia Avenue between Floral and Locust streets. It was the largest addition of parking to downtown ever.

Of those spaces, the city will rent about 110 spaces and Kaweah Delta Hospital will own another 100, leaving 440 spaces open to the public. Parking rental will raise about \$126,000 a year.

The parking garage cost \$13 million to build. More than half came from a federal grant. The hospital contributed \$2 million. The city put up the rest from a combination of in-lieu parking fees, Property Based Improvement District money from the Downtown Alliance, and money set aside for the purpose.

So Visalia has more parking, more parking revenue, and it still has a problem.

We agree that the city has to begin planning for parking now, especially for the east downtown project.

Plans for that area have already ruffled business interests, who contend that the city can't simply develop an area that requires people to leave their cars elsewhere unless it makes a provision for that.

Agreed, but a number of other changes in thinking must take place:

- Visalians must change their expectation of being able to park directly outside their destination. In larger cities, finding a parking garage or lot within 10 minutes walk of a destination is considered a blessing. And we're not talking about mega-cities such as L.A. or San Diego.

That also applies to mid-sized cities such as San Bernardino, Pasadena or Oxnard. And Visalia will soon be joining those cities in population. Finding parking at any price within five blocks of one's destination anywhere in the Bay Area is practically a miracle.

- Free parking requires a tradeoff. Visalians are blessed that parking anywhere in the city is free. No meters. No gated garages. For this luxury, however, somebody is paying, and this fact is rarely reported. Parking in-lieu fees, the PBID, the city's own parking revenue, make that possible. The city might need to find another way.
- From the standpoint of [air quality](#) as well as congestion, Visalia needs to become more comfortable with some forms of public transportation, along with becoming accustomed to walking a little farther.
- Visalians will adjust to a change of lifestyle only if it is made attractive. That means cool, shaded places as walkways and inviting, efficient means of public transportation.

The good news about parking is that Visalia really does have enough of it for right now. Doubt that? Examine all the public parking spaces in the PBID area - Conyer to Ben Maddox and Mineral King to Murray -- and you will no doubt find places to park.

Even better news is that Visalia examines the issue before it becomes a big problem. Far-sighted planning has always been Visalia's strong point. It figures that planning would also apply to its No. 1 obsession.

[Modesto Bee and Tracy Press, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, June 13, 2007](#)

This alternative is not eco-friendly

Ethanol has been touted as the savior of our fuel and environmental problems. Not so fast — there are a few problems with ethanol.

We would need 16 million square miles of farmland to even make a dent in the demand for petroleum.

It would take more fresh water than is available to grow corn for ethanol.

Consumer Reports says gas mileage for a Chevrolet Tahoe dropped 27 percent using E85ethanol — from 14 to 10 miles per gallon.

Ethanol would reduce some greenhouse gases but increase others. Smog would be much worse using ethanol.

Ethanol cannot be transported by pipelines, as it corrodes the pipe.

It takes almost as much energy to produce a gallon of ethanol as it produces.

Ethanol is a political remedy to keep the Iowa farmers happy. The main reason we have a energy shortage in the country is liberals. They will not allow us to drill in Alaska and off our coasts. They will not allow us to build a new nuclear plant or an oil refinery. They are trying to remove dams that produce electricity.

Until we get rid of these liberal politicians, we will always be reliant on foreign oil.

BOB HAMMONS, Tracy

[Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, June 13, 2007:](#)

Heal sick trees

I couldn't agree more that Bakersfield needs more trees. The more the better for shade and [air quality](#). At the same time, I feel that giving care to the trees we already have is equally, if not more, important.

In the city there are numerous trees that are in serious stress and will suffer severe damage or death. I am not a tree specialist, but I know a sick tree when I see it. Take a drive down California Street, between Oak Street and Chester Avenue, and notice the evergreen trees. They need deep watering and tree fertilizer.

This can be accomplished with very little cost by using a power post hole digger with a 5 inch auger bit to dig down about three feet, removing the dirt as you dig. Then insert a piece of 4 inch PVC pipe to the bottom of the hole and rising 6 inches above the dirt level. Fill the pipe with smooth gravel (to keep the pipe from filling up with dirt) and then use a 4 inch cap on the top of the pipe. This will enable you to water deep where the tap root is and also be able to feed the tree with liquid tree fertilizer.

Also any watering system that is available can be hooked up directly into the pipe, which saves water by watering the tree where it needs it.

Whatever way they can save these trees, they need to do it now so we don't lose the many years we have invested in getting them to maturity.

-- WILLIAM SCHMIDT, Bakersfield

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, June 12, 2007](#)

Police's real motto: 'We harass and annoy'

I am appalled that my tax dollars are paying the salary of the Modesto police and the state referee. Instead of serving and protecting, these guys are out to harass and annoy. I recently got a ticket for having an air intake system on my car. According to the state vehicle code, this is illegal, and my car was considered a [gross polluter](#). I was ordered to not drive until I got it fixed.

My car had passed two previous [smog checks](#) with flying colors and I got 30 miles per gallon, but I replaced my illegal part with the stock part. Then I took my car to the state referee and it failed the smog check. How ironic. Now, I am stranded until I get my car fixed. My car failed the check by 9 parts per million. Now I have to waste another day to get my car to pass with legal parts.

People are getting robbed, raped and killed every day, and drugs are flooding our streets and schools, but our police officers are writing tickets for illegal car parts that are actually better for the environment.

JERED ARQUIETTE, Riverbank

[Tracy Press, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, June 12, 2007](#)

Solar will power the Earth

Imagine a world where everyone has solar power, and everything, not just houses, runs off of it. There would be no more wasted gas, pollution or global warming. Wasted gas is a problem for us, both financially and environmentally. With gas prices topping \$3 a gallon, solar power is invaluable for conserving gas and bringing prices down.

Solar power is valuable for the survival of the Earth.

Joey Saar, Tracy

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, June 12, 2007:](#)

Greener government

State to begin grading itself on climate change performance.

California has long been a leader in energy conservation and climate initiatives -- especially when those policies fall largely on the private sector.

When it comes to ensuring that state agencies are upholding the highest environmental principles, though, the picture is more muddled.

Some agencies operate out of extremely efficient buildings, and encourage their employees to bike, carpool or take transit to reduce pollution. Others operate with an enormous carbon footprint -- with fleets of dirty, gas-guzzling vehicles or leased buildings that demand heavy loads of electricity.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and state lawmakers need to make sure that state agencies meet their obligations under California's laws to reduce greenhouse gases. The credibility of California's laws demand that state agencies meet targets for reducing pollution, just as private industries must do.

Apparently, the message found a receptive audience in California's Legislature. Two weeks ago, a Senate budget subcommittee approved a trailer bill that requires state agencies to prepare biannual "report cards" on their efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and meet their responsibilities under the governor's Climate Action Team Report.

Agencies would be required to post these report cards on state Web sites and submit them to a review by the State Auditor.

This is a terrific idea, and lawmakers and the governor should make it part of their final budget. If California hopes to lead the world in reducing greenhouse gases, it needs to first put its own house in order.

[L.A. Times commentary, Tuesday, June 12, 2007:](#)

Keep the home fires burning

Does L.A.'s ban on wood-burning fireplaces indicate a shift from our long human history of yearning for flame?

By Erika Schickel, ERIKA SCHICKEL is the author of the memoir "You're Not the Boss of Me: Adventures of a Modern Mom."

I GREW UP IN Manhattan, in the glow of the WPIX-TV yule log, so when I bought my home in Los Angeles, I made darn sure that it had a working fireplace. Most winter nights find my family

gathered before a crackling hearth, playing cards, reading or just staring, hypnotized, into the flames. Fire is, after all, the original hominid home entertainment center.

Turns out this creature comfort could make me a gross polluter in the eyes of the South Coast Air Quality Management District. My fireplace, along with the 1.9 million others, dump tons of particulate matter into the air, which leads to 5,400 premature deaths a year in Southern California. Particulate matter also makes compliance with the federal Clean Air Act nearly impossible.

Regional air quality managers last week approved a plan containing 30 measures limiting pollution caused by wood smoke, including a ban on fires on days when the air quality is unhealthy, a ban on installing wood-burning fireplaces in new houses and requirements for homeowners to replace wood stoves and fireplaces with gas log inserts upon sale of their home.

I've inhaled enough wood smoke to know that the AQMD has a point. It's pretty harsh stuff. But I am sorry we've arrived at the point in our evolution where fire has become bad for us. It has been our historical friend and is part of who we are on a primal level.

Of all the elements, fire is the only one humans can make. We have used it to our advantage for millennia. A whiff of wood smoke in the night air evokes comfort and security. It is a Proustian call to our primal selves. For wherever we humans have roamed and homed — in cave or castle, campsite or condo — fires have been at the center, warming us, feeding us, protecting us from animals and evil spirits. From this perspective, the Bic lighter can be seen as one of the most sublime expressions of the opposable thumb.

Maybe we've simply evolved right past fire. It's been replaced by central heating and television. In temperate Los Angeles, a fire is mostly a luxury item, like a bubble bath. It's little more than an element-based mood enhancer.

Frankly, I was surprised by the AQMD's grim statistics — wood fires add 7 tons of particulate matter to the air each day — as I was under the impression that fire-making was becoming a lost art. So many hearths these days seem to be stuffed with candles or dried flowers, or most obscene of all, TVs.

Any honyock can fall asleep with a burning cigarette and start a brush fire, but building and tending a controlled wood fire is a craft that requires study, practice and a grasp of basic physics. Like being able to drive a stick shift, fire-building is an essential life skill. My children are encouraged (and supervised) in their fire play. This weekend, we are celebrating the end of the school year with a ritualistic bonfire of their old school papers in our backyard fire bowl. Hold your breath, neighbors.

The AQMD's proposed rules — which must be voted on one by one to become law — are all very moderate and common-sensical. But it isn't hard to imagine a day coming when there's an outright law against fires, such as the one in the San Joaquin Valley, which fines violators \$300.

Also, isn't there something harebrained in plugging our flues while the hills around us burn? When I asked an AQMD spokesman about how much particulate matter wildfires contribute to air quality, he came up empty. Could we be missing out on an opportunity here? Maybe we could harvest all that dried brush, bundle it with yellow caution tape, throw in a fire voucher and sell it as "The L.A. Brush Fire-Starter Kit."

What the AQMD would really like to see us do is curl up in front of a hissing, odorless gas log. Personally, I get the same thrill from a gas fire that I do watching water boil on my stove.

Fire is not simply about light and heat, it's about combustion — logs rubbing together, popping and releasing smoke and heat. A fire has a dramatic story arc: from wood to ember to ash. A fire

has a smell, which we have a prehistoric jones for. Otherwise we might as well just settle for the televised yule log. Or, I know, we could get one of those blowers with the tissue-paper flames. Then we could live like a wax museum diorama of what life looked like back in the olden days when home fires were still legal.