

Editorial by Susan Tchudi

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The proposed Valley's Edge housing development is poised to move ahead after the Chico City Council reversed its previous decision to NOT develop Special Planning Areas until the General Plan of Chico was updated. Smart Growth Advocates, The Butte Environmental Council, and the Sierra Club oppose the project and want to provide housing for those who need it, protect our environment from the increase in greenhouse gasses, and maintain the precious ecosystem of the foothills.

The Valley's Edge Project is a developer's dream that would be a disaster for Chico. Proposed are 2,777 luxury housing units on 1,446 acres east of Bruce Road. It is an area of riparian woodland with vernal pools, wetlands, and oak trees where the foothills begin. The territory is home to 38 species of nesting and migratory birds, including burrowing owls, the loggerhead shrike, yellow warblers, and Swainson's hawks. Also threatened are vernal pool shrimp, a number of bat species, and the Western Pond Turtle. While the developers claim they could mitigate the impact on the land, there is no way to move a vernal pool or re-establish the endangered Butte County Meadowfoam elsewhere. In fact, the draft Environmental Impact Report says "the plan sets no clear parameters for the Meadowfoam preserves, including timing for establishment or management or monitoring requirements." *Photo: Current residents about to lose their home.*

During construction, huge amounts of dirt would be moved; grading by heavy equipment would be required; large machines would roar and vibrate. This constant human presence (during and after construction) and the dust, noise, runoff, and presence of polluting materials gives very little hope that natives of this habitat could survive, much less thrive. While the project claims that it will restore riparian areas and replant vegetation, these "mitigations" will be too little, too late for the wildlife supported by this ecosystem.

Even more damning for this project is the projected emissions of greenhouse gasses. This is an impact that—according to the Draft Environmental Impact Report—cannot be mitigated. According to the dEir, the proposed project would result in GHG emissions of approximately 3.13 metric tons of carbon dioxide per capita. Thus, the proposed project's estimated emissions would exceed the City's total 2030 efficiency target of 2.76 metric tons per capita per year.

Chico's Climate Action Plan (unanimously passed by the Chico City Council) calls for zero net emissions by 2045. However, the proposed Valley's Edge project, with a projected 5,654 residents would lead to vastly increased traffic and greenhouse gas emissions as people drive to town for work, appointments, shopping, and entertainment. Though the developers suggest that public transit could reduce that load, the notion that

people in luxury homes will take the bus to town is unlikely at best. And the lack of density of this project makes it improbable that any sort of convenient transit would serve this neighborhood.

In addition, the housing units proposed for Valley's Edge do not meet the needs of Chico's residents. According to an article in the Chico Enterprise Record on Friday, May 13, about the draft of the Housing Element for Chico, Chico greatly under-produced units for low and very low income housing in 2014 to 2022. In its new 2022-2030 draft housing element, the city "will need to allocate 1,101 very-low income, 507 low income, 770 moderate income and 1,110 above-income level units over the next eight years."

Valley's Edge's projected 2777 units vastly exceeds the need for 1880 moderate and above moderate income units. The developer claims that the project meets the General Plan guidelines of having a diversity of housing types, but there would be no housing for low or very low income people. In fact, this project seems designed to attract Bay Area and Southern California residents, looking to cash out of exorbitant housing prices and get comparable housing in Chico—affordable for them, but not for Chico residents.

The current General Plan calls for "protecting the environment [by] promoting compact, walkable, infill and mixed-use development"; In addition, the General Plan envisions that by 2030, Chico maintains its "small-town character through sound planning and orderly growth. The urban form is compact, with a clear distinction between the City and its surrounding lands"; Valley's Edge, this enormous 1,448 acre urban sprawl, would provide the opposite of compact urban form.

The conservative City Council's decision to bypass the General Plan process means that we need a forceful, fulsome response to STOP Valley's Edge. Concerned citizens and organizations are leading the fight against this and any urban sprawl projects. Those who want to preserve the quality of life in Chico can join the movement by contacting Smart Growth Advocates: smartgrowthchico@gmail.com.