

# Letters

## Continuing the fight against urban sprawl

### GRACE MARVIN

What a powerful argument Susan Tchudi made in this paper's 7/6/22 guest editorial. She argued against Valley's Edge, a sprawling project planned for east of Bruce Road — with entrances on the Skyway and East 20th Street. Major catastrophes would result from building more than 2,700 units (mostly luxury homes) in this location. Substantial data show: 1-the numerous types of environmental damages resulting from project, 2- how and why it would contribute to excessive climate changing pollution — extending far beyond the project's borders, and 3-how the high costs of houses would lure wealthy people to Chico, while not addressing the extensive affordable housing needs of Chicanos.

Furthermore, all but one of the parks in the 1,448 acres (east of Bruce Road and up against the foothills) would be private, i.e., not available to non-residents. This same land is prone to fire and to flooding — having been hit by both in recent years.

The Sierra Club's Mother Lode Chapter, the local Smart Growth Advocates, the Sierra Club's local Blue Oaks Group (formerly called Yahli Group), California Native Plant Society, Aqualliance, Butte Environmental Council, and other local organizations are getting out the word about the problems with Valley's Edge. We need citizens to consider these impacts, write letters against the project, and to contribute time and/or money to both the Sierra Club and to Smart Growth Advocates. SGA is continuing the fight against sprawl in other parts of our region as well.

**[Read the editorial, click here.](#)**

— Grace M. Marvin, Chico

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CALIFORNIA  
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY - MOUNT LASSEN CHAPTER  
PO Box 4067 Chico, CA 95927-4067 [mountlassen.cnps.org](http://mountlassen.cnps.org)

May 31, 2022

Mike Sawley, AICP  
Principal Planner, Community Development Department  
411 Main Street, 2nd Floor  
P.O. Box 3420  
Chico, CA 95928

Re: Valley's Edge Specific Plan

Dear Mr. Sawley:

The Mount Lassen Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) opposes the Valley's Edge Specific Plan project.

The project site contains valuable and increasingly scarce native habitat, including multiple bands of blue oak foothill pine woodland that cross the site. CNPS recognizes that plants are the foundation of our ecosystems, and oak trees are recognized as important keystone species in California. As the UC Oaks Website notes, "[o]ak woodlands are one of the richest broad habitats in the state with well over 300 terrestrial vertebrates utilizing woodlands at some time during the year. They are also extremely important for a wide range of insect life." (UC Davis Agriculture and Natural Resources, <https://oaks.cnr.berkeley.edu/wildlife/>). Approximately 20 percent of the site's trees would be lost to project development – that's more than 1,000 trees. The remaining bands of blue oak foothill pine woodland would be flanked on all sides by development, mostly low density residential, that would be interspersed throughout the 1,448-acre site. The fragmentation of the site as a whole could degrade the value of the remaining bands of undeveloped woodland as wildlife habitat. In addition, the increased proximity to development would increase the potential that any remaining undeveloped

areas would be degraded by, for example, the introduction of non-native invasive species, stormwater runoff from roads and other impervious surfaces, and increased human disturbance.

Grassland areas of the site include native wildflowers with occurrences of the federal and state endangered Butte County meadowfoam (*Limnanthes floccosa* ssp. *californica*) with associated wetlands, including vernal pools and swales. It is not obvious that Specific Plan provisions and Draft EIR mitigation measures would protect Butte County meadowfoam from potential indirect impacts during project construction and operation, such as runoff or dust. These concerns are raised in the Draft EIR, but not specifically mitigated.

The project would have other adverse environmental impacts including the following:

- Increased traffic congestion
- Vulnerability to wildland fire in the Wildland Urban Interface
- Increased greenhouse gas emissions
- Decreased visual quality of the native landscape

The site's important and largely irreplaceable natural resources would be sacrificed for residential development that would do little to alleviate Chico's urgent housing shortage. As the City's recently released draft Housing Element makes clear, what the city mostly needs is moderate- to extremely-low-income housing – *not* low-density luxury housing. The City has in the past failed to meet its target for moderate-, low-, very-low-, and extremely-low income housing, and this project would not help meet them.

In conclusion, the proposed Valley's Edge Specific Plan project should not proceed. The loss of natural resources and habitat that would be incurred, in addition to other adverse impacts, far exceeds any societal benefit this project may conceivably provide.

Sincerely,

Chris Mueller  
CNPS Mount Lassen Chapter Executive Board

## **DAVE GARCIA:**

### **To the Editor**

U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: Gridley, CA population 7/1/21 – 7,356

Average American Family Size 3.1

Valley's Edge proposed residences 2,777

$3.1 \times 2,777 = 8,608.7$  people added

The proposed Valley's Edge Subdivision to Chico is larger than the City of Gridley! We already have traffic congestion on 20th and Skyway and they want to add over 5,000 more vehicles to this bottleneck area? Chico was just placed on water rationing and they want to add another 2,777 residences? Chico plans to raise our sewer rates from \$22 to \$66 per month by 2025 and how much more with this massive housing addition?

Our quality of life in Chico is being threatened by quantity, bringing us the big city life of traffic congestion, more crime, more taxes, more noise and air pollution, added stress to our infrastructure plus the reduction and increased costs of our resources of water and electricity. Do you really want these changes?

— *Dave Garcia, Chico*

## **JEAN MARQUARDT:**

The Valley's Edge proposal could be Chico's largest housing sprawl. This development sited off 20th Street will include 2,777 residential units that will provide no real affordable housing. Most of the price tags will be for luxury homes out of reach for the people who need housing. There is also a lack of existing infrastructure consisting of water, fire protection and utilities.

Chico needs infill development for affordable housing and to use existing infrastructure. Valley's Edge is not an answer to the problems that we have now.

— Jean Marquardt, Chico

## **DAVID WELCH:**

While we face an important election in the coming days, we should not lose sight of longer-term issues. There are two massive developments currently in the approval pipeline for the southeastern part of Chico – Stonegate and Valley’s Edge. Combined, the two would add thousands of units of housing, much of it in the form of large, expensive houses on large lots sprawling across vast acreage of foothill terrain.

Chico badly needs more housing. But the housing we need is housing that matches the needs of the community. We need housing that people who live here can afford on the wages they can earn in this community, not housing designed to bring wealthier people from somewhere else. We need smartly designed infill development that uses the infrastructure we already have. We need more of the kind of compact, mixed use community represented by Meriam Park. We need sensible development that can be served by active transportation and, someday, by public transit, not auto centric sprawl that will add more traffic to our already overloaded and deteriorating streets.

Sprawl development like Valley’s Edge never pays for itself in the long run. It adds traffic to our roads and stresses all the elements of our infrastructure and degrades our quality of life, without bringing the revenue to pay for its true costs.

The Valley’s Edge development, as currently proposed, does not meet the needs of our community and should not be approved.

— David Welch, Chico

## **ELIZABETH DEVEREAUX:**

Chico must grow in, not out.

We need to understand that Valley’s Edge — the Chico mega-development planned between Skyway and 20th, Bruce Rd. and Honey Run — is only the

tip of the iceberg. Developers expect to build south from Chico to Butte College. Valley's Edge, with a proposed 2,777 units, is just the start. It's critical now for us to decide how we want Chico to grow. Do we want to sprawl like Fresno? Or do we want to preserve the unique quality of Chico — community-oriented, historic, and intimately connected to the natural environment?

We have so much underutilized land close to downtown. Can we grow utilizing existing infrastructure, with walkable sidewalks, tree canopies, small electric buses, and aesthetic affordable housing - not wasting taxpayer's hard-earned money on new infrastructure or sprawling over pristine lands because it's more profitable for developers?

Let's name some reasons why Valley's Edge should not be approved:

**FIRE:** it is in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Zone. The land has already burned three times in the last 19 years!

**TRAFFIC:** Its design is not compatible with Public Transit, and it's estimated to have 20,000+ car trips a day. Traffic on Skyway, 20th, and Bruce Rd. would be a nightmare.

**GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS:** The Valley's Edge Draft Environmental Impact Report states the emissions cannot be mitigated, causing dangerous climate change — and more fires, more drought.

**WATER:** Our mega-drought limits our water use, lowers our wells, creeks, and endangers our treasured heritage trees. Join [www.Smartgrowthadvocates.org](http://www.Smartgrowthadvocates.org). "GROW IN, NOT OUT!"

— Elizabeth Devereaux, Chico

## **LOGAN KRAHENBUHL:**

Housing is a huge concern in the Chico community. It's getting expensive to live here: the average house in Chico in 2022 is just under \$500,000. We need housing that working people can afford, not exclusive homes catered toward Bay Area transplants. The proposed Valley's Edge development, southeast of the city limits, will be totally unaffordable to people who currently live in Chico and the greater North State. Of the 2,777 units proposed to be built in the development, 83% will be huge, sprawling, and unaffordable homes. The current land is not within city limits, and due to the distance from the city's infrastructure, the Public Works department will not provide services to this area whatsoever. The Chico Police and Fire Departments will be expected to provide support for this increase of 8,000 Chico citizens without any additional hiring or resources. And not only will the homes be unaffordable but this area is bound to burn as it did in the 2018 Camp Fire. Without increasing fire department infrastructure, will the city be able to defend 2,777 more homes threatened by ever-intensifying wildfires?

Write your Chico city council member and tell them that the Valley's Edge development will further increase the steep price of homes in Chico and will stretch the city's public safety and infrastructure so thin that it will put peoples' lives in danger.

— *Logan Krahenbuhl, Chico*

## **SUSAN TCHUDI:**

I can see why one could be seduced by the proposed Valley's Edge development. On paper, this Eastern foothill project looks beautiful—parks, ponds, green spaces, walking trails amidst a large neighborhood, including apartments and housing for seniors. However, this project is in the wrong time and the wrong place.

The draft Environmental Impact Report is out for this project and it reports that two impacts— Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Aesthetics—are significant and cannot be mitigated. That means that the construction and the miles

traveled to get Chico and back can't be fixed. And this pristine riparian woodland area with its birds, reptiles and animals and plants will be slashed through with 2,777 housing units with an anticipated population of 5,654. The Valley's Edge development project is a contradiction (if not a violation) of some of Chico's guiding principles and documents. The current General Plan calls "protecting the environment include promoting compact, walkable, infill and mixed-use development." In addition, "In 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." This enormous 1,448 acre urban sprawl project provides the opposite of a compact urban form.

The Climate Action Plan, approved by Chico's City Council just weeks ago, calls for zero net emissions by the year 2045, aligned with the State's emission targets. According to the dEIR, "The proposed project would result in GHG emissions of approximately 3.13 MT CO<sub>2</sub>e per capita. Thus, the proposed project's estimated GHG emissions would exceed the City's 2030 efficiency target of 2.76 MT CO<sub>2</sub>e per capita per year."

And finally, the City Council will be approving the Housing Element Update, which emphasizes the need for affordable housing. The Valley's Edge development, with its Garden-of-Eden vision, is not meant for those in need, but for those with deep pockets.

*Susan Tchudi*  
*Yankee Hill*



# Editorial

**SUSAN TCHUDI:**

Chico Enterprise Record, July 6, 2022

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](mailto:smartgrowthchico@gmail.com).