

COUNTY PLANNING/

Live Oak 'don't get no respect'

Last in a series
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BACK IN THE '40s, when the Bartz family moved in, Live Oak was a series of chicken ranches and flower gardens. Forty years later, the once-bucolic enclave due east of Santa Cruz has grown into a little city with all the urban problems, but few of the trimmings.

Live Oak's population numbers more than 23,190 — nearly the same as the county's second largest city, Watsonville — but it has no public libraries. It has woefully inadequate sidewalks, roads and drains. Its park system is deemed the worst of all the unincorporated urban areas of the county.

In a word, some say Live Oak has been "ghetto-ized" by a plethora of tacky housing projects.

The transformation has angered some, and earned Live Oak a number of epithets, like "the dumping ground for low-income

housing" and "the Rodney Dangerfield of Santa Cruz County."

To Carolyn Bartz, those names are unfair, even though she's unhappy with the constant buildup around her. As president of the Live Oak Community Association — a quasi-improvement group with grass roots — Bartz sees a lot of beautiful things worth fighting to preserve in Live Oak.

"Live Oak still has some rural pockets left," said Bartz. "That's why I'd like to see no growth. But in reality it's going to happen ... I'd just like it better managed."

Bartz joined LOCA two years ago when she heard of a large low-income senior housing project going in on 17th Avenue. Since then, she's taken on a stronger voice in the fight against the county's land-use policies, which have seen Live Oak absorbing some 80 percent of the county's new low-income housing.

As a result of LOCA's continued pressure on public officials, one of those policies — the transfer of credits — was drastically altered to ease Live Oak's burden. Developers now have to use their low-income building credits in the same district they build in. The previous policy had allowed builders to develop huge low-income projects in Live Oak, and accumulate credits for low-income housing elsewhere. They were using their credits to build chi-chi housing in Aptos.

"Transfers of credit were killing us," said Live Oak Supervisor Dan Forbus. "I have no problem with low-income housing, but it should not all go into Live Oak. The social planners all say you take poverty and spread it out. Even that was getting

short-changed."

LOCA MEMBERS have taken up other fights against land-use policies, too. They've criticized the General Plan requirement that each new housing unit have 1½ parking spaces. The figure is based on the premise that 20-30 percent of the populace will ride buses. Bartz said the area needs more parking than that.

"Nobody in the world has just 1½ cars anymore," said LOCA member Janet Beautz, who is also employed as the group's attorney. "In our area, with the higher densities that are allowed, those things compound themselves."

Beautz and Bartz — it's easy to confuse the two — also view Measure J, the growth-control ordinance, skeptically.

"It didn't slow growth so much as it moved it all into the Live Oak urban area," said Beautz.

"We all realize Live Oak's becoming an urban area," said Beautz. "But we'd like to see it done in a nice way. We'd like to see the same number of parks and the same quality as other areas."

County planning projections show Live Oak will get 30 percent of the residential growth of the county between now and 1990, 46 percent of the new commercial development and 65 percent of the industrial development.

LOCA doesn't quarrel with the General Plan densities for Live Oak, but it objects to the constant "up-zoning" of its neighborhood, wherein developers get to build more units than allowed in the General Plan in exchange for financing other improvements or putting in affordable housing.

"If Live Oak had been developed as it was in the General Plan, people who've been there a long time wouldn't be reacting so adversely to the new development," said Beautz.

"The zoning designations don't protect anything," said Bartz. "I've been to Planning Commission hearings where the neighbors turn out, then go home thinking they're safe. But I'll go to the board and find it's all changed."

"Live Oak is a million little key-hole streets that serve five or eight houses," said Bartz. "A few years ago, almost anybody who wanted to up the density was allowed. Now what's happened is that the guy who sells wants to get the same density as their next-door neighbor."

LOCA was branded as anti-senior housing when it objected in May 1983 to the 76-unit senior-only affordable development going in at 17th Avenue, under the auspices of the Volunteers of America. To be built at the proposed number of units, the

developer, DaPont Construction, had to change the General Plan for a higher density.

Bartz and Beautz say LOCA was the lone voice calling for quality construction for the housing project.

"When it was first proposed, it was an attractive single story, Spanish-style building," said Bartz. "By the time it got through HUD (the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which provided financing) all the covered entryways, the roofs and porticos were gone. The halls were so narrow you couldn't get two walkers in at the same time."

(The county ultimately applied for a Community Development Block Grant to finance the tile for the sloping roofs.)

"Our point was there's a necessity for senior housing, but it should be quality," said Beautz.

WHILE LOCA keeps a vigilant watch on what goes into its backyard, Bartz and Beautz don't think their efforts have won the war.

"The best parts of Live Oak are being annexed," said Carl Johns, founder of LOCA. "We can't make a city out of Live Oak, anymore. Capitola took 41st Avenue and there it went. There's no way we can incorporate."

Is Live Oak destined to be the Goleta (near Santa Barbara) of Santa Cruz?

Without the possibility of incorporating, how will Live Oak find the money to finance the public works improvements it needs?

The county's financial situation has forced it to look to new development to fund public works projects, but that's a two-edged sword, bringing more development to an already congested area.

LOCA members say they need a lot of people in Live Oak, but they fear the future will bring only more of the fixed-income and poorer segments to their environs.

Even Supervisor Gary Patton, a staunch supporter of Measure J, said, "The whole community has to help Live Oak. That is the challenge."

The future holds more problems than answers. Crime is up in Live Oak, the beaches are strewn with litter and land's cheap, keeping the pressure on from developers.

Members say it will take continued pushing on the politicians and more education of its members to succeed in preserving Live Oak's integrity.

And, members say LOCA will continue to fight for quality construction. "We don't see why we should sacrifice our community for a developer who's trying to make a buck," said Johns.