

Have growth-control measures backfired?

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

PASATIEMPO — Growth management, imposed by its "political growth managers," was caricatured as "a capitalist plot in communist clothing," Wednesday by UCSC Professor Paul Niebanck.

Growth management controls such as Measure J in the county and Measure O in Santa Cruz actually escalate housing costs while having little affect in controlling population, he said.

Further, "GM" probably harms

the environment, rather than protecting, and in the long run has little effect as far as size "on the manifest destiny of a community."

Niebanck is a professor of environmental studies at UCSC and last spring was the host professor of a forum of professionals looking at growth management.

His talk Wednesday was well-received by the Housing and Community Resources Committee of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce at its lunch meeting.

"While proponents of growth man-

agement see themselves as liberals, or to the left of that, they are acting like super-capitalists."

He says that limiting the issuance of new house permits creates a guaranteed market with maximum profits and its protected by the government bureaucracy that's created to impose "GM".

"GM," Niebanck said, "is something like a homeowners' cartel."

The price escalation drives out the poor by increasing the median cost of homes and it preserves "the homogeneity" of neighborhoods that

separates racial and economic mixes our maturing nation is trying to avoid.

Niebanck said his early studies dealt with the hardships of "involuntary relocation of populations caused by redevelopment projects" 20 years ago.

He lamented that "growth management, in an indirect way, does what redevelopment did in a frontal way in relocating people."

Government-limited housing is not a guarantee of a cleaner and better

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nurtured environment, he said.

"Environmentally degrading behavior ends with self-restraint," he

said.

Niebanck sees growth management as a political tool used "by a

new political elite that is moving to power.

"Growth management is a way to accrue and hold power because people get convinced that all hell will break loose if I (the growth manager) am voted out."

A planner himself, he said, "Planners get a bum rap with growth management" since they are no longer the executors of their community's design.

"With GM, the politicians have assumed ascendance over planning and it creates in a creative mind the planners, a bureaucratic mind, rather than a creative mind."

Niebanck said that the housing issue "is only the veneer, a manifestation" of the forces that shape a community.

He said that such forces cannot be controlled by growth management because "ultimately they will overwhelm the opposition" or that the attempts at control "will distort the community."

The professor said the community, or the region or state government, should "meet the forces, invite them in and work with them."