

# The '70s: A Time For Environmentalists To Take On City Hall

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Third of six articles

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Had a visionary developer come to our quiet county in 1970 with plans to build a new city of 56,000, he or she would still be fighting city hall.

By now the plans would be in shreds, torn apart by environmentalists, professional planners, city and county managers and the people's elected officials.

The frequency and duration of public hearings, alone, would have aged the blueprints into parchment.

Such a city would demand major services: sewers for the more than 20,000 new homes, roads for the 30,000 cars, schools for the thousands of new kids in the neighborhood, parks, libraries, shopping centers, electricity, precious water and more and more government.

The environmental impact report — the final examination of development — would be thicker than the Los Angeles telephone book and the decade's headlines about the project would read like War and Peace. Mostly war.

No such visionary developer appeared, but a city — of sorts — arrived in the 1970s.

The 56,000 city grew internally within the urban and rural areas; it came parcel by parcel and house by house.

It came during the age of ecology and it happened despite strenuous, at times even perhaps law-stretching, efforts to control growth by tightening land use law.

By mid-decade, county supervisors, seeing that the population trend was reaching six percent a year, began attempts to hold the line and optimistically set a target population cap for 1990 of 218,500.

State-mandated general plans legalized the setting of population goals and empowered local jurisdictions to set land use policy and thereby control growth.

The city of Petuluma and other areas passed growth control ordinances, tested and found legal in courts.

In 1978, county voters approved Measure J, a growth

control ordinance authored by Supervisor Gary Patton to set yearly population limits in the unincorporated area.

In 1979, the county board set a limit of 2.2 percent increase (about 3 percent was expected) and for 1980, 2.4 percent.

In 1979, the city of Santa Cruz adopted Measure O which set a population increase limit of 1.4 percent. Together, the two growth control measures set limits for over 140,000 of the 180,000 population.

Despite it all, including the escalating cost of homes and financing, totaling a five-fold increase the past ten years, Santa Cruz is under intense pressure by families outside seeking to fulfill dreams of living where the living is good.

They come to a climate that is nearly ideal in a land that is nearly idyllic.

The first year of the decade was a record year in money spent for development. A total 1,078 building units were provided, way down from the 2,000 in 1963-64, but unit-building would climb to the 2,000 market during years of the decade.

Building costs for an average home had increased from \$14,854 in 1964 to \$21,509 in 1969. It would climb to \$45,000 to \$60,000 by the end of the decade.

Ten years ago, only the professionals in planning, a very few officials and a scattering of average folks and students were concerned enough about environmental problems to make an outcry.

By 1970, the state had created the California Environmental Quality Act. Subsequent law mandated general planning, which had been voluntary by agencies for a number of years until then, and in 1972 the Friends of Mammoth court decision ordered private developers, as well as public project planners, to file environmental impact reports. The EIRs judge projects on their potential damage to the environment, among a host of other things. They cost money, and in a lot of cases, cause arguments. They, if honestly and thoroughly done, serve as early warnings.

In this county, the first battle of the environment had to do with a road proposed to connect Scotts Valley and Highway 17 to San Lorenzo Valley. It was the battle of the Mt. Hermon Bypass Road.

The road bypass had been proposed a couple of years prior to the decade's opening when the original Mt. Hermon Road developed a "bubble" that that broke its paved surface and moved the road section northerly from where highway engineers and motorists

wanted the road to remain.

The county, backed by the valley business community along with conference center administrators and residents, decided the best way to solve the problem was to build a bypass road north of the center.

Costs in 1968-69 were at around \$750,000 for the county and in June of 1969, the federal government came in with slightly over \$2 million to make the dream of a bypass road a simply and practical matter.

Headlines read "Valley Residents Hail Mt. Hermon Road Aid," and articles confirmed the valley was "jubilant."

Congressman Burt Talcott, the man in Washington who brought the bacon home, was feted at at luncheons, and the business community began calm debate on which of three routes was the best.

During 1970, something happened in the valley and in covering a Feb. 5 meeting in Felton, Sentinel Reporter Bill Neubauer came in with the surprising lead, "Not everyone loves the route," and details of citizens who had begun to complain the new road would com-

mercialize the valley turning it into a "shopping hub" and that the rural area was becoming a victim of "progress."

Public pressure resulted in a series of meetings where cries of "ecological disaster" were heard and valley cars started supporting bumper stickers that read "I Am a Vicious Opponent of the Mt. Hermon Road," and "Save the Meadow."

The meadow lies just east of the Highway 9 intersection in Felton, and its lower portion now holds the Felton Faire Shopping Center.

It was also claimed by opponents of the road that it was being built to accommodate the proposed center.

As the word was spread, it finally came down to a point where the only supporters of the road appeared to be the Scotts Valley city hall and businessmen, the SLV Chamber of Commerce, three of 67 Felton businessmen (most did not like the intersection problem at Highway 9) and valley Supervisor George Cress.

The conflict peaked at a meeting held May 18, 1971,

when the public influenced the board of supervisors to put the issue to election.

Despite his feelings, Cress voted to let the road decision go to a popular vote, all the time maintaining it was the best solution to the problem.

It would have been the first election on a major projects, the first ballot check on a proposed official action in this county. But it never went to an election, because county attorneys said the issue was not proper for the ballot.

(As it turned out, the honor of being the first to vote on such an issue went to Santa Cruz City voters when they cast ballots on city involvement in a proposed convention center at Lighthouse Field in 1974.)

The road was built, has since been added to on the eastern end to connect to Scotts Valley Drive, and the shopping center was built.

Both are used today by the public without protest.

However, the road helped cost Cress his job in the election of 1972.

The pattern of the Mt. Hermon Road issue occurred

again and again in Santa Cruz politics, producing candidates from conflict, political movements from environmental issues.

The environmental move stopped three major enterprises in and near Santa Cruz, a convention center at Lighthouse Field, a village on the north coast and, so far, a nuclear power plant north of Davenport.

A number of major projects, including Galleon Heights north of Boulder Creek and Aptos-Seascape in lower mid-county were delayed during the seven years that environmentalists controlled the county board until mid-1978. Those projects moved through the courts and appear settled by boards that road the new conservatism of Proposition 13 into office in 1978.

Commercial enterprises were forced by the increased population, and in the financial coup of the decade, the small city of Capitola captured the 41st Avenue Mall through annexation.

Today, the sales tax return to Capitola appears to be a trust

account that preserves the coastline village from having to go commercial.

At the end of the decade, the county doesn't appear so very different from 1970. Still, 20 percent of more of its forested and beachlands are held in some form of public ownership. Vast tracts are in timber and agricultural preserve.

The cities have filled in a lot, but that should slow down with the growth management systems in effect.

The coastline is protected by the California Coastal Act, and there will probably be no more houses on the ocean side of the highway.

Builders need larger and larger parcels of land in order to get a housing permit; septic tank controls have tightened, and the San Lorenzo River has a management plan, although as yet it has not been enacted.

Yet to come will be environmental battles about proposed dams, off-shore oil drilling and super tankers at Moss Landing.

And, there is now increased concern about pesticides and toxic material dumping.

The air quality continues to be good, due mainly to the pre-1970 establishment of the air quality boards.

But, the area has been tagged by Santa Clara planners as a bedroom community for its workers. Retirees who have the money to buy are at the door, and all the while, there is a constant reminder that the orchards of Santa Clara no longer exist.

New Santa Cruzans will arrive every day in the coming decade and beyond for we are a seller's market.

And, only the compromise that was close by the end of the decade — builders agreeing begrudgingly to growth management and general planning, and environmentalists settling for what they could get in court — will decide the destiny here.

A best guess is that Santa Cruz will remain beautiful as it grows more busy.

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TOKYO (AP) — Honest Tokyo cabbies made it a merry Christmas for three persons, returning packages of money totaling \$37,000 which had been left in their hacks, Japanese newspapers reported today.