

Growth control still priority

By GARY PATTON

The growth issue — past

"Politics" is the way that we make choices as a community. Debate, discussion and controversy lead ultimately to political decisions on the key issues confronting us. In 1978, our community spoke with respect to growth management, adopting a comprehensive program to prevent further urban sprawl and to concentrate new development in existing urbanized areas; to give strong protection to prime farmlands; to require the production of affordable housing; and to provide this community with a way to slow down or increase our rate of growth, on an annual basis.

Our community has rejected the claim that unrestrained growth is "inevitable." The latest court vindication of Measure J, which follows on past vindications, both legal and political, recognizes and reaffirms the basic policy choices our community has made about growth.

The growth issue — present

Despite the best efforts of county government, many, if not most, people believe that our community still is not adequately managing or controlling growth. Here are some of the problems:

- Limiting the number of building permits issued doesn't necessarily mean that population growth itself slows down.
- Growth induced by activities of the cities is not subject to the county's growth-management system.
- Growth focused within existing urbanized areas is now overstressing our urban infrastructure, particularly our road and highway system.
- The University of California is presently discussing plans to double its size within the next 14 years. If realized, these plans for growth at UCSC could overwhelm our community, adding immeasurably to traffic problems and housing problems.

The growth issue — future

We've responded to many of the problems that confronted us in the early 1970s. We've given significant protection to our farmlands and have stopped the urban sprawl that was rapidly destroying the environment and character of Santa Cruz County. We've met our 15-percent minimum affordable housing goal and we've cut the population growth rate in half.

The fact that we still confront problems — and significant problems — is no argument to throw out the system we have now. We've got to do even more. Here are some thoughts about future directions:

Growth decisions need to be linked much more directly to a determination that there is adequate infrastructure available to accommodate the growth allowed. Our system needs to be revised to accomplish this.

City governments, as well as the county government, should be involved in a cooperative decision-making process, where growth issues are concerned. City governments should combine forces with county government, to develop a truly countywide growth-management system, so that decisions by city governments respect the environmental, housing, and infrastructure limits which constrain us on a countywide basis.

As federal and state cutbacks for affordable housing are made, we need to discover new ways to assist in the production of affordable housing. Our system needs to be revised to require more of a contribution from both new development and our existing residents.

The University of California at Santa Cruz will be making decisions on its own future growth during the upcoming year. To the extent that the university wishes



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to grow, it should make an enforceable commitment to grow only at the rate that it can actually provide for the necessary support for the new people attracted to the campus. As a practical matter, that means that no new students, faculty or staff should be attracted to the university campus until the university is able to provide adequate housing for such persons and to make certain that adequate traffic mitigation measures will actually be in place at the time new students, faculty, and staff arrive.

Finally, the Regional Transportation Plan now under review by the Transportation Commission should provide for an aggressive Transportation Systems Management Program, to make sure we use our existing transportation network more effectively. It is an illusion to think that we can pay for massive new freeways and roadways to handle increasing traffic loads. It is a double illusion to think that building new roadways would in fact solve traffic problems. Highway construction projects over the hill, and in all metropolitan areas, indicate that new roads breed new traffic jams, in even bigger amounts. What we have to do is learn to use our existing systems more effectively. It's been done elsewhere, and it can and must be done here.

County government has just completed a five-year review of Measure J. The successes of Measure J have been documented and the new challenges noted. 1987 is a year in which new steps must be taken to insure that we continue to realize the commitment of this community to a growth-management system that protects the environment, that preserves the character of this community, that makes space for persons with average and below-average incomes, and that maintains the quality of life for all of us who are privileged to live in this beautiful place.

(Gary Patton has represented the Third Supervisorial District on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors since 1975. He is the author of Measure J, the referendum measure which established the county's growth-management system, and which was adopted by the people in June 1978.)