

NEWS

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Guest Opinion: City of Planned Progress: Fighting for local land use control

by Jerry Thorne / Pleasanton Weekly

As your Mayor, I would like to provide you an informed perspective regarding the issue of growth, state-mandates and growth management.

I appreciate the efforts of pleasantonvotersforsmartgrowth.org/ but without a careful understanding of the issues and the strategic decisions made over the past decade by city leaders, we risk once again of subjecting ourselves to state mandates unnecessarily. In 2006, the state of California, along with a housing advocacy group, sued Pleasanton. This suit argued that our voter-approved Housing Cap of 29,000 residential units was illegal and discriminatory because it prevented the city from making long-term plans to accommodate housing for all income categories.

The plaintiffs also argued that municipalities like Pleasanton should be limited in their ability to regulate housing, meaning, a local city would not have the freedom to limit the size, massing or quality of construction, nor have the ability to mitigate development impacts, such as traffic and school impacts.

For several years, the city aggressively defended its position in the courts on the grounds of local control. While we fought the good fight, ultimately the court sided with the state on the first argument, concluding our voter-approved housing cap violated the state's regional housing goals (also known as RHNA). This resulted in the city having to rezone approximately 70-acres of land to accommodate the court order.

As to the second argument, the court's decision was less clear. During settlement discussions with the plaintiffs, Pleasanton successfully safeguarded our discretionary review and our ability to establish local standards for home builders to follow. Why is this important? Our development standards are now among the most rigorous in the state.

To that end, we will soon update Pleasanton's Housing Plan. Protecting our community from uncontrolled growth and preserving our small town feel is my Number One priority and we will do it without inviting additional lawsuits against the city. Our mission will be to preserve the quality of life that we have grown accustomed to without violating state law. The current draft housing element achieves this objective (currently available on the city's website) and is not proposing additional re-zonings; additionally, I will be proposing the down-zoning of some property as a result of the good work we've done to date while also ensuring that current and future state obligations can met.

Furthermore, by continuing our existing growth management policies our limit on new housing permits is currently set at 235 units annually; the lowest ever in the city's history.

This forward thinking, multi-year(s) approach underscores our commitment to being a City of Planned Progress. This approach continues to preserve our local discretionary land use powers, limits future neighborhood disputes, and averts costly lawsuits against the city. Please join me in preserving Pleasanton's legacy of careful, balanced and thoughtful planning.

Editor's Note: Jerry Thorne is completing his first two-year term as mayor of Pleasanton after serving seven years on the City Council. A retired corporate executive with more than 40 years in the private sector, he also served for 10 years on the city's Parks & Recreation Commission.