

Opinion

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Tejon Ranch plan sounds pretty good to us.

In the case of northern Los Angeles County and southeastern Kern County, if we don't build planned communities in coming years, we will get unplanned communities.

Planned, or unplanned, more residents, new arrivals, are coming. If we fail to plan, they will come. They are coming no matter what.

Who are they? Those making a mass exodus from the L.A. basin to escape escalating home prices and population congestion. Projections have the high desert's population jumping from nearly 350,000 today to over half a million by 2020.

Where will they go? Lancaster, Palmdale, Rosamond – and Tejon Ranch's Centennial development.

Centennial – still at least five years away from rooting its first homes after lawsuits and environmental impact reports find their way through the maze of courts and governments agencies – is planned to be a 23,000-home, master-

planned community in the northernmost corner of L.A. County near the intersection of State Route 138 and Interstate 5.

At completion, probably no sooner than 2030, the Tejon Co.'s plan is to create a community where at least 60,000 residents live, work and play.

Dissenters – some nearby neighbors and people of no-growth/low-growth, high-control bent – say the Tejon development will create urban sprawl, another Los Angeles destroying the natural beauty of the area for surrounding communities and threaten the pristine environment and habitat.

"We are trying to stop urban sprawl. We're trying to do smart growth," said Sylvia Swan, a founding member of Tri-County Watchdogs, which is weighing its opposition to the project.

There is no doubt that opponents of the Tejon Co.'s plans believe the project grandiose, even overwhelm-

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FOCUS: Developers of the Centennial community at Tejon Ranch have just the right vision in mind, not only to build a master-planned community, but maintain much of the integrity and history of the land.

ing. It sounds to the opponents as if homes will overrun the rolling hills of the historic ranch along with rural lifestyles of surrounding residents.

Actually, preventing this sort of negative impact is exactly what Centennial developers have been planning for nearly a decade.

Developing only 5% of the 400,000-plus acre historic Tejon Ranch property – which is the largest private landholding in the state of California – planners have put together a well-thought out, environmentally sound, mixed-

use development that preserves the remaining acres and its natural resources.

We hear from critics that this sounds like the company line. That doesn't mean it's untrue.

The community is planned to be as self-sufficient as one can be – buying and using available water supplies, utilizing water and wastewater treatment plants, developing underground water storage for peak water use times, and even generating electricity from a power plant near the development.

As long as one lives in the desert, there will be water concerns. Already Tejon developers are beyond many of our existing cities and counties, planning for recycling, storage, conservation and preservation of this precious resource.

As for sprawl, Centennial is not going to happen over night. Schools, commercial districts along State

Route 138, the Tejon Industrial Center, already up and running, and public services are anticipated to create nearly 30,000 jobs for the region over time. Employment opportunities will range from professional, light industrial, commercial, warehouse and retail.

While Jack Kyser, senior economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp., says many things work against Centennial's development because of its distance from Bakersfield and Los Angeles – 30 and 60 miles, respectively to the north and south – the plans may in fact work well for the already 50,000 Antelope Valley commuters who now make the trek to L.A. daily.

Surrounding communities like Lancaster, Palmdale, Rosamond, even the mountain communities of Lebec, Frazier Park, and Gorman, will benefit economically from the employment opportunities and shopping amenities.

Moreover, the Antelope Valley would likely see other economic returns with Centennial's development – improved transportation routes, more business for existing professions and the growth of the Valley's own employment base to support the sprouting population. Environmental impact reports are yet to come. Those compiling the data will methodically listen to concerns. We have no doubt the Tejon Ranch Co. already has prepared for or can mitigate, any negative impacts revealed in forthcoming reports.

Despite all the efforts, we know, no matter how hard some people work to mend differences and find compromise, sometimes there's just no pleasing some people.

One thing is certain: If the Tejon Ranch Co. is not allowed to build the Centennial community the right way, years from now someone will come along and do it the wrong way.

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