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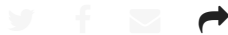
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COMMUNITY COLUMNS

The biggest question to ask ourselves after vote is 'Salida how?'

BY DENNY JACKMAN

AUGUST 17, 2007 7:32 AM



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Who's to pay for ongoing costs of Salida Now? For decades, the enclave of Salida was a productive farming community known for its small-town character and the agricultural abundance of the surrounding farmland.

In the past decade, piecemeal housing developments sprawled east and west over some of the best farmland in Stanislaus County. Salida is now home to more than

12,000 residents with limited urban services. Water for the existing Salida urban area is provided by the city of Modesto. Police protection of residents and property is provided by the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department.

Because of a 3-2 vote by the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors, voters-taxpayers will no longer have the opportunity to answer through their vote whether or not Salida Now?

Many questions must be answered about this major growth issue. Budget reports to the Board of Supervisors have shown deficits for maintaining urban services to Salida to be in the red \$2.5 million to \$4 million annually. The bulk of the shortfall is for providing Sheriff's Department protection in the urban area. With more than 5,000 houses in the Salida Plan, it is difficult to trust developers who promise that sales taxes and jobs will relieve the existing tax burden on all county taxpayers.

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Since the city of Modesto cannot assure its own future growth will have adequate supplies of healthy water, it cannot supply water to new Salida development. Where will the proposed portions of Salida get water?

Setting up new stand-alone water treatment systems fed by unreliable wells is incredibly expensive. Existing Salida residents will not likely choose to leave the security of the Modesto water system to support a new and expensive water treatment facility. What will happen to the water levels in underground wells when the concrete cover of urban areas no longer recharges the groundwater as farmland does?

Stanislaus County is drafting farmland mitigation that proposes saving an acre of farmland for every acre of farming converted to urban use. The Salida plan says that it will protect farmland, but only that taken for housing. What about the thousands

of acres of prime farmland lost to commercial, industrial and business park development? Surely the negative impacts upon the agricultural industry due to prime farmland lost need to be mitigated regardless of the type of urban conversion.

Taxpayers need to seriously question the end result of Salida Now. Ask, Salida how?

Jackman is a longtime advocate of farmland protection and a former Modesto City councilman.

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