

# Farmland Working Group

*Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.*

## Many reasons to oppose huge River Walk proposal



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### SPECIAL TO THE MODESTO BEE

By Matt Beekman, Jeani Ferrari, Lori Wolf  
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The city of Riverbank is still early in a process that will be highly consequential for how, where and at what pace cities pursue residential development in Stanislaus County.

A Notice of Preparation for the Environmental Impact Report of the River Walk Specific Plan was completed approximately two years ago. The full Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for River Walk is expected to be completed this spring.

River Walk would expand Riverbank's Sphere of Influence by 1,535 acres and annex nearly 1,000 acres, making it the single largest development project in Stanislaus County in over 20 years. The scale of the project alone should be a cause for concern considering the conversion of some of the best farmland in the world, as well as potential impacts to infrastructure and city finances.

Riverbank residents should understand that they will be responsible for footing part of the bill for infrastructure improvements to accommodate this project and have already started paying for it in their recent sewer rate increase.

One must question the wisdom of building a large-scale residential development in a flood plain. River Walk's location is prone to floods and has flooded three times in the last 75 years. The Farmland Working Group hopes that this legitimate concern is adequately addressed in the upcoming EIR. It is worth mentioning that over 15 years ago, parcels in the annexation area were deemed ineligible for a conservation easement by the Army Corps of Engineers due to concerns regarding potential for flooding.

Stanislaus County Local Agency Formation Commission has raised concerns about the pace at which Riverbank is filing for annexations. LAFCO approved a 1,479-acre annexation for Riverbank in 2016. The intention articulated by the city was to have the annexation accommodate growth for the next 20 years.

Just three years later, Riverbank obtained another 400-acre annexation referred to as Crossroads West. Approving a third annexation that violates Riverbank's own articulated rates of growth in previous annexation requests creates a dangerous precedent, allowing annexations to be based on false premises. This lack of factual basis would erode transparency or accountability at LAFCO.

LAFCOs are an important check to ensure development will not have long-term negative consequences. A key part of this check is a document referred to as a Municipal Service Review. An MSR is "a comprehensive study to determine the adequacy of governmental services being provided by the local agencies under LAFCO jurisdiction." Riverbank's current MSR has not been updated to account for another expansion to the scale of River Walk.

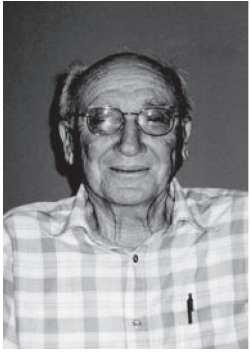
The River Walk project would create a county island by surround-

“Farmland Working Group hopes the city of Riverbank reconsiders the River Walk project and keeps its commitment to prioritize infill development and agricultural buffers to its west.”

ing the unincorporated Park Ridge and River Heights neighborhoods. Such county islands become problematic in providing services to, and are to be avoided.

The River Walk project would directly violate the terms by which LAFCO approved Riverbank's annexation in 2016. In that annexation request, Riverbank explicitly stated a commitment to

## FWG Welcomes New Director



**Vance C. Kennedy, Ph.D.**

Vance is a retired research hydrologist, U.S. Geological Survey, and maintains active contact with the organization. He operates a small farm north of Modesto. His academic background includes degrees in chemical engineering, geophysics, geochemistry, and geology. He is establishing a fruit stand market on his property, specializing in citrus

(some quite uncommon), and will re-sale products from local farmers. Saving Central Valley farmland for future generations has been Vance’s major goal for many years. Helping local farmers to survive fits that goal.

“ Saving Central Valley farmland for future generations has been Vance’s major goal for many years. Helping local farmers to survive fits that goal.. ”

## Happy 100th Birthday!



Modesto Mayor, Sue Zwahlen, presents Vance Kennedy a Congratulations Certificate for 100 year birthday



Former Modesto Councilman, Denny Jackman, presents Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors recognition to Vance Kennedy for 100th birthday

## 2023 Denny Jackman Scholarship Recipient Carolina Mandujano Monter — Patterson High School



**Statement of Future Plans:** My plan for when I graduate from high school is to go to Modesto Junior College, which is a two-year community college. I later plan on transferring to either Stanislaus State University or UC Merced and graduate with a Bachelor’s degree in Spanish. My focus after that is to gain a teaching credential and become a high school Spanish Teacher.

“ ...make sure to elect qualified and educated individuals who know our region really well and know how to treat difficult situations.” ”





# Worth repeating — Summer 2006

## Message from the Chair

Our last issue focused on the number one concern of Valley residents – Growth. Specifically, the negative impacts of growth: traffic congestion, air quality and the loss of farmland. The bigger picture is the impact of growth on our quality of life.

People moving to the Central Valley are often seeking a better quality of life for themselves and their families. The new transplants are often leaving areas that have intolerable traffic congestion, and sprawling growth that has consumed open space, farmland and all sense of place.

***The Ag Element is one of many tools that can be used by the County to reduce farmland loss and put development in urban areas where there are appropriate urban services.***

For the new transplants, their new hometown feels good. There is open space and farmland and a sense of community. For the longtime resident, the perception is very different. Open space and farmland is disappearing and traffic

congestion and dirty air makes home feel more and more like Los Angeles.

The recent study by American Farmland Trust, *The Future is Now: Central Valley Farmland at the Tipping Point?* and the Great Valley Center's 2006 Conference, *At the Tipping Point*, express what many believe, that the Central Valley is at the tipping point. If we continue to grow our cities the way we have in the past, we are destined to become another San Fernando Valley. We are reaching a point of no return.

There are elected officials who understand that the Central Valley is at the tipping point and are doing the right things to preserve farmland and food security. The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors will be doing the right thing if they adopt the 2006 Ag Element to the General Plan...

The Ag Element is one of many tools that can be used by the County to reduce the loss of ag land and put development in urban areas where there are appropriate urban services.

Farmland Working Group commends the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors for updating the Ag Element of the General Plan. We applaud Supervisor Jim DeMartini for his commitment to creating a document that puts real language and real policy on the table to protect our irreplaceable farmland.

*Continued from page 1*

not developing properties to its west, and designated the land as agricultural buffer. These buffers are spelled out as a plan for "agricultural preservation," which is also referenced in Riverbank's General Plan that prioritized infill development.

There need to be consequences for such potential bait-and-switch tactics. If cities can defy long-established codified LAFCO policies without consequence, all residents in Stanislaus County, urban and rural, will lose an important check against unbridled growth that can have long-term consequences for our agricultural economy that injects billions of dollars into our county annually, providing the ability to fund first responders and to maintain ad-

equated infrastructure.

Fortunately, it is early in the process for the River Walk project. Changes can be made. Farmland Working Group hopes the city of Riverbank reconsiders the River Walk project and keeps its commitments, as articulated in its annexation request in 2016, to prioritize infill development and agricultural buffers to its west. This would be for the direct benefit of Riverbank and county residents while ensuring the maintenance of Stanislaus LAFCO's critical role.

Matt Beekman, Jeani Ferrari and Lori Wolf are members of Turlock-based Farmland Working Group's advocacy committee.

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And her Commitment to  
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# Farmland Working Group

P. O. Box 948 Turlock, CA 95381

 [www.farmlandworkinggroup.org](http://www.farmlandworkinggroup.org)



**Support our group - become a member**

Organizations *Opposed* to the River Walk Project



  
**Farmland Working Group**

*Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.*

*Voters for Farmland*



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