

Forecast for Slow Growth

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, March 2007

If you are concerned about too much development and the traffic congestion and crowding that it brings, you can take heart in a recent report by the UCSB Economic Forecast that found Ventura County's population growth is slowing down. According to the recent release of the UCSB Economic Forecast for Ventura County, our population is growing at 0.8 percent, down by more than half from its 2.1 percent growth rate in 2001. The headline, according to Bill Watkins the Executive Director of the Forecast Project, is that Ventura County is now growing slower than Santa Barbara County. Even if you are not a slow growth advocate, it is good news to everyone that the study also found our economy is doing great.

Ventura County's economy has been growing faster than that of either the state or the nation. Productivity is up, commercial real estate vacancy is down, unemployment is low, and housing prices are holding steady. How can that be? Slow Growth AND Economic Vitality? Watkins said he thinks a big part of the answer lies in our quality of life. People and businesses want to be in Ventura County because it's so nice.

One of the reasons it is so nice is because we have slowed growth. Citizens, concerned about urban sprawl, passed the county's Save Open space and Agricultural Resources ordinances that protect open space and farmland by vote of the people. Since the county-wide SOAR was approved in 1998, proposals for tracts of high-end houses on open space and farmland outside of our cities have been rejected by voters. If you include with that the 3,000-plus housing development that would have made Ahmanson Ranch the county's tenth city, close to eight thousand luxury homes could have sprawled outside of cities and into the greenbelts that surround them. Keeping the greenbelts distinguishes us from areas such as the San Fernando Valley where planned greenbelts between Sherman Oaks and Van Nuys, between Woodland Hills and Reseda were a nice thought, but the fortitude wasn't there to uphold the vision.

What makes Ventura County desirable is we have upheld that vision. Protecting Ventura County's prime farmland and keeping development within cities is good for our economy, less expensive to municipal government, better for the environment, and maintains the buffers between our cities that add to our quality of life. Both the desirability of Ventura County and the health of our economy are helped with growth patterns that sustain agriculture and limit urban sprawl.