

Opinion: Looking to future, living within our resources

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Plan Santa Barbara, the city's General Plan update, will be the guide as to how our city will develop and grow between now and 2030. Since this will have such a major impact on both our city and our neighborhoods for the foreseeable future, it is and will continue to be one of Allied Neighborhoods Association top priorities.



With the start of the new year, Allied believes it is time to step back and assess our vision for the future of Santa Barbara.

We believe that the most important goal is to maintain Santa Barbara's unique qualities that have set us apart from other coastal cities. Santa Barbara needs to maintain its quality of life as is embodied in its charm, small-town character, diversity and historic resources. People have said over and over again that they want to maintain these qualities, which are basic to our financial viability.

We agree that if Santa Barbara is to be sustainable, the most important aspect is to live within its resources. Our city has managed to do this by maintaining its slow-growth policies. Water, of course, is and will be the most limiting factor. With the State Water Resources Board saying that it will be able to supply only 5 percent of contractual entitlements this year, conservation has become even more important to ensure that we will maintain this resource through times of drought.

Open space is another resource that will need creative solutions. While Santa Barbara has a wealth of parks, unfortunately they are not evenly distributed and this needs to be addressed by providing more open space where density is highest.

We need to get smarter about our transportation policies and recognize that the best way to alleviate future congestion is to stop approving expansion in the wrong place. We already know that certain intersections are bad and yet we continue to allow more intense uses there. For example, the proposals to change Elings Park to a regional park comes to mind as does other increased density uses in Hidden Valley.

We must recognize that failure to live within our resources will have very negative

consequences for all aspects of sustainability. We agree with former mayor and planning commissioner Sheila Lodge that "The most sustainable thing Santa Barbara can do is to continue on its slow growth path."

The higher the density we allow, the closer we get to the tipping point where provision of resources will become much more expensive for all of our residents, resulting in Santa Barbara becoming an even more expensive place in which to live.

Affordable housing has been and will continue to be a problem since Santa Barbara is such a desirable place to live. We need to be realistic and recognize that with all desirable places in the country, not everyone who wants to will be able to live here. We also need to realize that commuters will always be with us, and that we cannot ever provide the type of housing at the price that many desire.

We need to be clear when addressing the community that they understand that the type of affordable housing the city is working toward with Plan Santa Barbara is what many would term upper-middle class housing and market rental housing.

However, unlike the proposed policies, we see that both of these types of housing are best met by maintaining the number of units allowed by variable density and only cutting down on the size of these units. Esteemed local architects Gil Berry and Tom Bollay have shown how this can be done. Their ideas are good examples of Santa Barbara-type solutions to address Santa Barbara's problems.

Rezoning for the high-density models that have been put forth at past meetings is unwarranted, because we already have zoning for many more people than our resources can accommodate. We need to study and examine such items as adaptive reuse and rezoning our commercial zoning. We need to work with what we have and can afford in order to service future generations.

Without these types of solutions, we run the risk of sacrificing those very goals and values that we all hold dear. Santa Barbara has a long history of stewardship that has made it a desirable and unique city. Let's not get carried away with theoretical non-Santa Barbara ideas and models.

The author is president of Allied Neighborhoods Association.