

# Where Land Use Planning Goes to Die

Supervisors trade the environment for the Dana Reserve and a false promise of affordable housing.

by Andrew Christie

**Alternative L Map: 534 Homes plus 266 MF Units (800 total Units)**

**LEGEND**

- Bike & Pedestrian Trails
- Multi-use Trails (includes Equestrian)
- Streets And Avenues
- Parks And Basins
- Parking Lots & Comm. Areas
- Cluster Lots (Town Home)
- Mid-Income Lots
- Luxury Home Lots
- Multi-Family Complex

**SF&MF UNIT COUNT:**

**Single Family**  
200 Mid-Priced Homes  
52 Cluster Homes  
282 Luxury Homes  
534 Subtotal of all SF Homes

**Multi-Family**  
154 Low-income Apartment  
112 Optional Mid-income A  
266 MF Low-High Subtotal  
800 Total Units

Approx. 104 Acres of Contiguous Oak Woods  
Plus 5.1 Acres of Drain Basins and 20 Acres of Parks/ Parkways

**OAK IMPACT: AS FEW AS 430 OAKS CUT WITHIN DEVELOPMENT**

NOTE: PROPOSED BUFFER SETBACK FROM SANDYDALE PROPERTIES: 100'

**SUPERVISORS APPROVE DANA RESERVE HOUSING PROJECT IN NIPOMO**

**Site Plan Details:**  
NBD 4: 64 MID-PRICED HOMES (APPROX. 60 TREES LOST)  
NBD 5: 88 MID-PRICED HOMES (APPROX. 80 TREES LOST)  
NBD 6: 24 MID-PRICED HOMES (0 TREES LOST)

Other features include: PARKWAY, PARKING, 1.5 ACRE COMM. PARK, 100' WIDE PEDESTRIAN & BIKE EASEMENT, 100' WIDE PEDESTRIAN & BIKE EASEMENT (EQUESTRIAN RESTRICTED), 100' BUFFER (SETBACK) BETWEEN EXISTING RESIDENTIAL FENCE LINE AND NEW LOTS, PEDESTRIAN & BIKE TRAIL TO NIPOMO GARDENS & DANA ELEMENTARY, COMMUNITY AMENITIES, BASIN, and 101 road marker.

**Board to Nipomo: Drop Dead** A superior project design concept submitted by the Nipomo community cut no ice with the SLO County Supervisors, who approved the project as proposed, with all its devastating environmental impacts.

On April 24, the SLO County Board of Supervisors approved the Dana Reserve, the largest commercial/residential development proposal to come before them in over two decades.

The Nipomo development, planned for 288 acres and wiping out rare chaparral habitat and the vast majority of an oak woodland on site, also entails significant impacts to air quality, water supply, and population growth -- all of which the supervisors ignored on a 3-2 vote to approve, with Supervisors Jimmy Paulding and Bruce Gibson dissenting.

Oak woodlands have higher levels of biodiversity than virtually any other terrestrial ecosystem in California. SLO County destroyed 1,000 oaks adjacent to the Dana Reserve site to make room for the Willow Road Extension. The California Oak Foundation projects that one million acres of oak woodland will succumb to development over the next 30 years and 750,000 more acres will be threatened. That's on top of the million acres of California's oak woodland lost to development since 1950.

On the first day of the two-day hearing, Supervisor Paulding started it off by asking: How do we get to a point where the benefits outweigh the costs?

The supervisors never got there.

Supervisor Gibson asked how the project's significant air quality impacts would be mitigated by a measure that only suggests, but does not require, that all homes built be all-electric, and would only eliminate natural gas hookups "if feasible," an undefined condition.

Golden State Water, the water purveyor for the region, voiced its strong opposition to the project's "fatally flawed" hydrology analysis. They pointed to eleven years of declining rainfall and groundwater levels, noting that its current customers have been under mandatory water restrictions since 2013. Where is the water going to come from for over 4,500 new residents, a population increase of 30%.

Battalion chief fire marshal Deana Foos testified that the project's layout and evacuation plan were "reckless and dangerous," and "a plan to fail" in terms of fire safety.

Ara Costello and other representatives of the Central Coast Student Coalition noted that the project was "a design financed by deforestation."

The fig leaf the board majority used to cover the project's multitude of sins and justify its approval was the claim that we need more affordable housing, and the Dana Reserve will deliver it. Planning Commissioner and longtime affordable housing advocate Anne Wyatt had already given the lie to that claim at the commission's October 24 meeting with a devastating critique of the project's alleged affordable housing component:

"We don't have any promise of affordability.... We have no covenant of affordability. What we have here is a stated hope that these homes are going to be affordable. And that's very different than actually affordable.... I see this program benefiting roughly fifty buyers in the home buyer's program. We don't even know if the first homes are gonna be affordable because we haven't done the math yet on the likely home prices.... It's not possible to build affordable housing at market rate and promise it's going to be affordable without covenants of affordability. So if we're passing this project along with all of its impacts, based on some hopes and dreams for affordability, we're not doing our job and our due diligence. So we're not there. I don't hear a chance, honestly, for making this affordable. I think that's a pipe dream."

The board had a better option before it: "Map L," as created and submitted by the Nipomo Action Committee and the board's South County Advisory Council.

In our comments to the board, the Sierra Club noted that “None of the project alternatives in the final Environmental Impact Report included site plans or concept maps to illustrate the changes proposed and locations of the various mixes of housing and open space. This meant the Planning Commission was essentially flying blind when it deliberated on the project alternatives. You now have before you the detailed alternative your Planning Commission lacked. The fact that this alternative plan is the product of a community volunteer effort betokens a concern by residents for the preservation of their community and a level of involvement in the planning process that we have not seen in over fifty years of our chapter’s work protecting the environment of the Central Coast. This extraordinary community effort should weigh heavily in your deliberations.”

Herb Kandel of the Nipomo community coalitions noted that the community’s alternative concept map represented an “unprecedented opportunity for a better outcome.”

Instead, the board majority slapped the community in the face and chose to ignore all the above, a petition with 4,000 signatures asking for a better plan, and five voluminous planning documents and ordinances which the project violates, the product of years of extensive community input and the work of professional planners, representing the will of the people.

In sum, the board majority ignored the words of Stephanie Pincetl, Director of the California Center for Sustainable Communities at UCLA, who noted that the Dana Reserve project as proposed “is yet another example of 20th-century approaches to land use that have caused the current climate crisis. It will generate absolute vehicle miles traveled, destroy carbon sequestering oak habitat that is not substitutable or mitigable (habitat is unique to place, it’s not a generic concept, interchangeable anywhere), perpetuate segregation and exposure of lower income populations to higher sources of emissions, will generate serious runoff, and more.”

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors is now officially part of the problem.