

## **Supervisors: Job creation is the key to Dunnigan development**

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If they build the houses, will the jobs follow?

That was the central question Tuesday when county supervisors held a public workshop on the proposed Dunnigan Specific Plan, which, if implemented, would be the largest land-use development proposal undertaken in Yolo County since the Southport Area Plan in 1982.

The proposal, which has been in the works for more than a decade, would transform the small town of Dunnigan — population 1,400 — into the county's fourth-largest city by adding more than 9,000 new homes and, it's hoped, more than 11,000 new jobs.

But whether those jobs would accompany all the new "rooftops" is the million-dollar question supervisors said they would like an answer to before they give the plan the green light.

Under the county's existing General Plan, new developments like the Dunnigan Specific Plan are required to produce a balance of 1.2 jobs per household. Those jobs are also supposed to produce wages that match the local home prices.

As each phase of the new development is completed, the General Plan requires monitoring to ensure that the jobs-housing ratio is being achieved.

"If, at the end of any phase, the required jobs/housing relationships are not achieved," the General Plan states, "the county shall require immediate and effective actions to be taken by the developer to ensure that the required jobs/housing relationship is achieved as a part of any subsequent phase."

And while there is nothing new about the language in the General Plan, proponents of the Dunnigan Specific Plan, led by developer Elliott Homes, have reservations about its achievability.

According to county staff, proponents are concerned that economic development will be challenging in Dunnigan, particularly in the early phases and until there is a large enough population of consumers and workers who would attract potential businesses. The problem is compounded by the weak economy.

If the county is allowed to halt development if the 1.2 jobs-to-houses ratio is not achieved in the first phases of the development, the whole project may have trouble attracting financing, staff said.

But the fact that proponents are expressing doubts about achieving the jobs-to-housing ratio before even breaking ground gave several supervisors pause during Tuesday's workshop.

"My concern is if we build a couple thousand homes and the jobs aren't going to be there, there's still going to be pressure to keep building," said Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis. "Can we really do this... and not have the nightmare of a bunch of houses and people getting on the freeway to drive 50 miles to go to work?"

According to county staff, if sufficient jobs are not created in Dunnigan, residents will indeed "likely commute to Woodland, Davis or Sacramento to work."

That, in turn, would impact both air quality and traffic in the county, not to mention the county budget.

Revenues needed

According to the county, residential construction generally results in negative revenues for the county, as the cost of services provided exceeds the property tax generated.

Without supplemental revenues provided by economic development — such as sales tax revenue — “Dunnigan will likely be a drain on county finances, requiring subsidy that would have to be paid from contingencies or cuts in existing programs and/or service levels,” county staff said.

And then there is the whole reason behind Dunnigan residents’ desire to grow their town.

The tight-knit community has worked hard to see the goal of a future Dunnigan complete with schools, parks, stores and businesses come to fruition. In addition to the Dunnigan Advisory Committee working with county staff on the specific plan for a number of years, residents banded together in the past year to fight a plan to locate a large truck stop at the gateway to their city — a truck stop that would have been adjacent to what residents hoped would be the town’s first school.

But without jobs to go with the housing, county staff said, “Dunnigan would simply develop as another commuter suburb and would lack the vitality that is crucial to eventually create a self-sustaining community.”

“I think the jobs/housing balance is the keystone,” said David Morrison, assistant director of planning and public works. “Without that, none of this is going to work.”

Supervisor Mike McGowan of West Sacramento agreed.

“I have strong reservations about whether the project can be done in a way that meets all the (hopes and dreams) of the people,” he said. “Odds are we’re going to end up with a large suburban area where people have to drive (miles to work).

“I will not be voting for a project that waters down the standards we set out,” he added.

Ag mitigation

Meeting the jobs/housing ratio requirement wasn’t the only concern expressed Tuesday.

Proponents of the project also seek relief from the county’s agricultural mitigation rules.

The Dunnigan Specific Plan would involve building on 2,300 acres of existing farmland, costing the developer about \$23 million in mitigation. Rather than the current requirement of an acre of mitigation for each acre of farmland to be developed, proponents suggested a 0.5-to-1 ratio, or a half-acre of mitigation for each acre of farmland developed.

And while proponents received support from a couple of supervisors — Matt Rexroad of Woodland and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District — who appeared amenable to relief on ag mitigation, other supervisors were adamantly opposed.

“That’s a non-starter,” Provenza said. “I’m not willing to go there. Agricultural land is fundamental to our General Plan and county policy.”

Provenza said he remains undecided on the plan itself, but said the fact that proponents seek relief on the jobs/housing ratio requirement is “a red flag.”

Rexroad, meanwhile, said that while the bottom line is the jobs/housing balance, “I would like this to continue and I would like to be a part of the discussion. It’s an exciting thing to be able to go through.”

Rexroad recalled discussions that set the Dunnigan Specific Plan in motion years ago when then-Supervisors Helen Thomson and Mariko Yamada both supported the idea.

“This seemed like a community that wanted this,” he said. “We could have put rooftops anywhere and any number of people would have stepped forward and built those out. We chose Dunnigan because we were trying to create a community, not just rooftops. We chose Dunnigan because we were trying to do something better.”

Move forward

Proponents of the project, meanwhile, urged supervisors on Tuesday to allow them to proceed.

“We would like to stress that we allow this process to go forward rather than stopping it,” said Neil Busch, chairman of the Dunnigan Advisory Committee.

In the end supervisors chose to do just that — hold off on any action for now, pending further information, including a fiscal analysis of the project that has yet to be completed. The matter was continued to a later date.