

# County supervisors hit the brakes on Dunnigan plan

**By Anne Ternus-Bellamy**

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WOODLAND — Yolo County supervisors on Tuesday refused to move forward with an environmental impact report for the Dunnigan Specific Plan, citing ongoing concerns that the project would not produce enough jobs to keep the town from becoming just another commuter suburb whose residents travel to work in Davis, Woodland or Sacramento.

In the works for more than a decade, the Dunnigan plan would be the largest land-use development proposal undertaken in Yolo County since the Southport Area Plan in 1982. It would transform 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 has been the primary concern of supervisors, who held a workshop on the plan in June and on Tuesday were urged by Dunnigan residents to allow them to move forward with an EIR.

Under the county's existing General Plan, new developments like the Dunnigan Specific Plan are supposed to produce a balance of 1.2 jobs per household. As each phase of the new development is completed, the General Plan requires monitoring to ensure that the jobs-housing ratio is being achieved.

But at the June workshop, proponents of the plan, led by developer Elliott Homes, had reservations that it could achieve the required jobs/housing ratio in the initial phases of build-out. They said economic development will be challenging in Dunnigan in the early phases and until there is a large enough population of consumers and workers who would attract potential businesses.

That worried supervisors, including Jim Provenza of Davis, who said at the time, "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. 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?"

Reviews of the plan conducted since that workshop seem to back up those concerns.

A report by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments called the plan's job projections "aggressive" for the manufacturing, retail and professional sectors. SACOG also said small communities often have difficulty attracting economic investment and that without a large-

scale employer committing to locate in Dunnigan, it is unlikely that the employment projections will be fully met.

“It’s a very competitive environment for all cities and counties to attract jobs,” David Morrison, the county’s assistant director of planning and public works, noted on Tuesday. “It’s not going to be easy.”

Meanwhile, the county’s economic consultant, Bay Area Economics, estimated Dunnigan would produce between 7,700 and 8,700 jobs at full build-out, producing a jobs/housing balance of between 0.9 and 1.0 jobs per household, short of the 1.2 target set by the General Plan.

On Tuesday, proponents offered a plan that included job creation thresholds at each phase of build-out, so, for example, if after the first phase, 80 percent of the required jobs were created, phase two of housing construction would begin without restrictions. But if 60 to 80 percent of required jobs were created, phase two would begin with only 1,000 new homes being built. If only 40 to 60 percent of jobs had been created, only 500 houses would be built.

The plan didn’t mollify supervisors.

“I have a problem with starting out with a target way below the jobs/housing balance,” Provenza said. “Under this approach, we get to a place where we pretty much have to go ahead because we’ve built half the project (even if we don’t have the jobs).”

Supervisor Mike McGowan of West Sacramento said he wouldn’t vote for the project “without a guarantee that there will actually be jobs there when these houses are built,” and added that “this does not appear to be an achievable project.”

Dunnigan residents, however, urged the board to allow the project to move forward.

“Right now we have a lot of businesses that have approached us,” said Neil Busch, chairman of the Dunnigan Advisory Committee.

“They didn’t commit because they don’t want to commit resources to something that might not happen. We have to step forward. It’s not guaranteed, but a lot of things aren’t guaranteed.”

Price Walker of Elliott Homes told supervisors “we are going to work diligently for jobs.”

“We are not planning infrastructure for houses only,” Walker said. “Clearly there is reticence on rooftops only. We’ve heard you loud and clear. It’s pretty clear if we don’t get the jobs in the first phase, we can’t go forward.”

If the jobs are not there after the first phase, and the project doesn't go forward, Morrison said Yolo County would be left with a city the size of Winters, "but without employers like Mariani, Buckhorn and Putah Creek Café."

In the end, the board voted to take no action until proponents return with a revised plan that better addresses the jobs/housing balance.

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