

## **Editorial: With Dunnigan Hills, Yolo supervisors take stand against sprawl**

By the Editorial Board

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Where Sacramento County supervisors earlier this year delivered a body blow to smart growth by approving the Cordova Hills project, Yolo County supervisors last Tuesday delivered one against sprawl. They sent the Dunnigan Hills project back to the drawing board.

Both projects propose to drop a whole new city into a rural part of the region – Cordova Hills with more than 8,000 new homes and 25,000 residents; Dunnigan Hills with 8,000 new homes and 23,000 residents.

The Dunnigan Hills project was pitched to Yolo County as a 21st century city that would include jobs so people wouldn't have to drive far to work – reducing traffic congestion, air pollution and driving time, improving quality of life.

In the end, however, the developers, led by Elliott Homes, backtracked from that vision. They asked for relief from the county's general plan target of 1.2 jobs per household. They pitched, in essence, an "if-you-build-houses, jobs-will-come" illusion.

Yolo County supervisors weren't buying, telling the developers in a 4-1 vote to redo their plan in a more realistic manner. The one "no" vote came from Supervisor Mike McGowan, who doesn't think Dunnigan Hills can work in any form.

Given how difficult it is even to attract jobs to Davis, home to a major research university, the developers simply were not convincing that they could bring jobs to a rural area in northern Yolo County.

Supervisor Jim Provenza captures the skepticism of the board. He told The Sacramento Bee's editorial board that, as presented, Dunnigan Hills would "end up being a bunch of houses with people getting on the freeway to get to work," a 1960s sprawl-style development, not a 21st century city.

People would end up driving 40 miles to Sacramento or 40 miles to Vacaville for jobs. That's more than 150 miles a day for a two-earner household, "not what we want to encourage," Provenza said.

This is no time to add yet another sprawling bedroom community to the Sacramento region with little employment and where people will have to drive to distant jobs.

While supervisors had a host of other concerns – losing 2,300 acres of agricultural land and financing of new water and sewer infrastructure, for example – the jobs issue proved decisive.

The development group had made it clear that it would not be able to produce a balance of jobs per household in the early phases of the project, the first 2,400 homes.

Even at full build-out, the county's economic consultant, Bay Area Economics, estimated that the project would produce between 7,700 and 8,700 jobs for 8,000 residences. That is less than 1 job per household, well short of the 1.2 jobs per household target set by the general plan.

Yolo supervisors have stuck to a general principle of steering development to existing cities, not to rural areas.

If this was the right project, truly a city of the future with jobs close to home, Yolo supervisors could find a way to mitigate the loss of agricultural land and figure out water and sewer issues. But the Dunnigan Hills project, in its current form, is nowhere close to that.

Yolo County, with more than 90 percent of its land dedicated to agricultural production, is a great asset in the Great Central Valley and the Sacramento River Delta. Supervisors are right to concentrate on strengthening the county's existing cities and towns.

As it should be, nearly 90 percent of the population in the county is concentrated in the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and Woodland, the county seat. The county also has unincorporated towns, such as Esparto (gateway to the Capay Valley), Madison, Clarksburg and Knights Landing, along the Sacramento River.

County supervisors would do better to keep existing cities and towns viable and sustainable, working to improve them before adding new leapfrog communities. Yolo County supervisors made a smarter decision on Dunnigan Hills than Sacramento County supervisors did on Cordova Hills.