

# Living by the dump

Placer County OKs major residential development, college campuses near landfill

BY GRAHAM WOMACK

In recent decades, Placer Ranch sat largely undeveloped as nearby cities Roseville, Rocklin and Lincoln more than tripled in population. While regional housing shortages have continued to fuel explosive growth in southwestern Placer County, there has been a good reason the 2,213-acre area stayed vacant:

It sits adjacent to the Western Regional Sanitary Landfill.

No matter. The Placer County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 on Dec. 10 to approve the Placer Ranch Specific Plan and to update a development plan for the parent 8,497-acre Sunset Area plan.

The board's actions could bring 8,000 residents and campuses for Sacramento State University and Sierra College to the land. But even supporters of the plan acknowledge that the smell could be unavoidable in the new development, where the closest houses will sit just 2,000 feet from the landfill.

"There will be odors," Supervisor Bonnie Gore told SN&R. "But they can be mitigated to a good amount and we feel like we've done enough to make sure that that landfill—which is a huge priority to our community—is protected."

County records show that Placer Ranch contributed \$1,000 in 2019 to Gore as well as \$200 to another Placer supervisor, Jim Holmes.

The board's meeting in Auburn lasted more than eight hours with testimony from the Alliance for Environmental Leadership, or AEL, a coalition of 14 groups that submitted an alternative plan for the land.

"Obviously, I'm a little sad and discouraged," said Annie Bowler, a member of the group. "But we're not giving up. There's lots and lots of people that are not in favor of this development as it's currently going through."

A Dec. 11 press release from the county noted that the goal of the Sunset Area plan update was "to create a unique employment, entertainment and education center that would provide regional benefit and create high-wage jobs for residents of nearby cities and unincorporated areas." The release also noted that the Placer Ranch Specific Plan would add "approximately 8.5 million square feet of commercial, employment and

university-related, non-residential use," as well as roughly 5,600 homes.

Michele Kingsbury, a management analyst for Placer County, said the concepts for Placer Ranch and the Sunset Area have both been around for more than 20 years.

"It's just a natural growth and extension of development in this area," Kingsbury told SN&R.

AEL chairperson Leslie Warren said her group spent \$11,000 on its plan, which proposed dwelling units for all 60,000 people who would be working in the Sunset Area "so people won't have to commute out of the area to find housing." Warren said she believes the county gave short shrift to its plan, while prioritizing its own.

"It's a 1980s plan that they're approving in 2020, and it's not going to be built out until 2050," Warren told SN&R.

"People aren't going to want housing from 1980."

Steve Pedretti, director for the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, defended looking past the alliance's plan.

"With the AEL proposal, it was essentially some private citizens, a small group of private citizens, who were planning other private citizens' properties without talking to them," Pedretti told SN&R.

The land for Placer Ranch is owned by a company connected to Eli Broad, who Forbes estimates as the 84th-richest person in the world with a net worth of \$6.8 billion as of Dec. 13.

Meanwhile, the alliance has taken to GoFundMe to finance a possible lawsuit under the California Environmental Quality Act. As of Dec. 19, the group had gathered \$3,740 in donations.

Warren said her group was looking at taking some of its key issues to the state legislature and state agencies including the California State Transportation Agency, Air Pollution Control District and Solid Waste Management Board. She also said she had contacted her attorney and was strategizing about next steps.

"It's determined that we have grounds for a lawsuit," Warren said. □

**"There will be odors."**

Bonnie Gore  
Placer County  
supervisor



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