

Editorial

GROWTH NEEDS TO BE BEST FOR CITY

By *The Record*
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Last week's Stockton Planning Commission meeting was like a trip back in the time machine in some ways. And totally different in others.

A 2,100-home development was the type of project routinely considered by the Planning Commission - and later by the City Council - in the time just after the turn of the century.

What was different this time? Well, in most cases, the Planning Commission would give its whole-hearted approval back in the days of growth and a great economy. This time, the commission voted no.

The slim 4-3 vote against the Bear Creek East project shows there's a different mindset on the commission and about development in general. MCD North Stockton was seeking to build on 160 acres just to the south of Eight Mile Road.

The Planning Commission's vote, of course, is not binding. The City Council won't take up the matter until sometime in 2014 and could certainly reverse the citizen commission's vote on the plan's environmental reports.

Regardless, this sort of development would be years away with the current economy.

There was an accompanying part of the Planning Commission meeting that had some City Hall observers stunned. Steve Chase, the city's Community Development director, spoke to the commissioners before their vote. He asked them to consider Stockton's "saturated" housing market.

"It's time to get real and have adult conversations about the fabric of our community," Chase said. "If anything, I still think we're too big for our britches and some belt-tightening is needed. If we're talking about adding lots, we better be talking about subtracting lots somewhere else."

Whoa. Talk about a broad-side shot at developers. And from a community development director, no less, even with the city's written reports seeming to back the plan.

The focus of this issue should not be on this specific development. There are boarded-up, foreclosed homes throughout the city, remnants from our time as the nation's foreclosure epicenter. There are thousands of lots approved for construction, but dormant because of the economy.

There also has been a cry for more infill and investment downtown. Chase has been a proponent of this approach.

But the question must be asked: Is Stockton making it "friendly" enough for builders to consider infill and downtown investment? Are the hoops to jump through too many - and too expensive - to realistically go that route?

Campaign for Common Ground, of course, spoke out harshly against the development and threatened its requisite lawsuit. Some things don't change.

Ultimately, the economy is going to turn around to support growth. It could be two or three years; it could be more.

For the future, it would be best if all involved could work things out as stakeholders who care about what's truly best for the city. That's not going to happen if this becomes a legal battle.

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