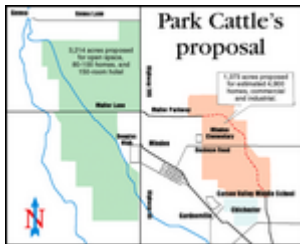


Project debate could determine future of Carson Valley growth

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By [Scott Neuffer](#)
Staff Writer,

What kind of growth is best for Douglas County? That is the question at the center of the Park Cattle debate.

Park Cattle Chief Executive Officer Brad Nelson said developing the company's 4,500 acres of land under current agricultural zoning, which would allow one house per 19 acres for a total of 236 units, would chop up the Valley and provide no public benefit.

"There would be no access to public lands including the Carson River, a significant loss of treasured view sheds, from both Highway 395 and State Route 88, no new school sites, no regional parks, no new jobs, no economic diversification and no workforce housing opportunities," Nelson wrote in a letter to the Douglas County Community Development Department.

The Park Ranch Specific Plan, under review by county officials, involves two large chunks of land: a 1,373-acre parcel east of Highway 395, and a 3,214-acre parcel of land west of Highway 395 between Mottsville and Genoa lanes.

Park Cattle is proposing a master plan amendment to turn 800 acres of the east parcel into a receiving area for residential, commercial, industrial, retail, and public use development. They have proposed about 4,900 dwelling units for the residential sites. Fifteen percent would qualify as workforce housing, Nelson said. The plan also includes dedication of lands for schools, fire and paramedic and sheriff substations.

"This is a key element of the Park Ranch plan because the needed regional public infrastructure improvements cannot currently be funded by existing county taxpayers," Nelson said. "This project will facilitate the near term completion of Muller Parkway."

The 570 remaining acres of the east parcel would be reserved for open space, parks, drainage and flood control improvements.

The majority of the west parcel, approximately 2,800 acres along the East Fork of the Carson River, would be preserved as agricultural land and open space.

“The specific plan proposes to allow public access to several miles of the Carson River for recreational activities, hundreds of acres of land available for equestrian and walking trails, totaling 4 square miles of permanently preserved and protected open space,” Nelson said.

Proposed developments on the west parcel include residential clusters in the north and south corners, totaling about 80 to 100 units, a business park and mixed use commercial site near the Minden-Gardnerville Sanitation sewer treatment ponds and a 150-room hotel as part of an expanded Danberg Home Ranch park.

Under current zoning, Park Cattle could take advantage of clustering bonus densities without amending the master plan. Clustering allows higher residential densities on agricultural land in exchange for the preservation of open space. Clustering would allow Park Cattle to build about 600 units on their combined acreage rather than 236. “This option would have very significant infrastructure, municipal water and sewer system costs and, like the 19-acre land use option, offer no public benefits to the residents and taxpayers of Douglas County,” Nelson said.

Nelson estimated Park Cattle’s plan would generate 6,000 permanent jobs, 14,000 construction jobs and \$5 million in net revenue to the County every year. He said the community needs to remember the four-phase plan is a 25 to 30 year undertaking.

“The bottom line is that I and the Park family believe this will be a huge benefit to the community,” he said.

John Garvin, Co-Chairman of the Sustainable Growth Committee, disagrees.

“This project is so huge, it will forever change the complexion of Carson Valley,” he said. “Then after Park Cattle, who comes next?”

Garvin said he’s heard promises before about development benefiting the community.

“Visions of gold coming into the county coffers has been presented before, but it has never panned out,” he said. “Historically, developers have never paid their fair share of infrastructure. They build their houses first, and existing infrastructure lags behind because the revenue from residential construction is not sufficient to support new infrastructure.”

Garvin questioned Park Cattle’s job growth predictions.

“It’s too long of a planning period to make accurate projections,” he said.

Garvin said Park’s plan also undermines the newly-approved growth management ordinance, which allows a two percent rate of growth, compounded annually, and sets a scheduled allocation of building permits, including previously approved but unbuilt projects. The ordinance was passed by county commissioners June 7, 2007 and took effect July 1, 2007. It will appear on the 2008 November ballot as an advisory question.

Garvin said a lot of public input went into the ordinance, resulting in a compromise between sustained growth parties and developers.

“The magnitude of the Park project throws the whole premise behind the ordinance into chaos,” he said. “The bottom line is that Park Cattle should conform to the master plan guidelines.”

However, Nelson said a master plan is meant to be flexible.

“There’s a feeling the master plan can’t be changed or shouldn’t be changed,” Nelson said. “But master plans by definition are plans, and they are created with the tools to make changes.”