

## Park Cattle offers blueprint for Valley's future

by Don Rogers, [drogers@recordcourier.com](mailto:drogers@recordcourier.com)

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Into this summer's election year stew of economic, growth and environmental issues will drop Park Cattle Co.'s ideas for developing 4,500 acres of pasture over the next quarter of a century.

That ought to bring things to a boil pretty quickly.

Somewhere between "hell, no" to one more house and "what's wrong with Las Vegas anyway" lies a crucial debate about the right growth for Carson Valley. What's sustainable, in other words, to build and maintain the very best community qualities?

Rampant growth clearly is not the answer. Ask any refugee from the Bay area or the L.A. megalopolis. Look at Reno.

We're not seeing much growth for the moment in Carson Valley, with some neighbors losing businesses or jobs, services cutting back, donations down, much of the community feeling strained, slightly more people leaving than moving in. I doubt many of us would choose a long run down this path if we could help it.

So what's the right balance?

Growth has been a hot topic here, as it should be, inspiring the formation of slow-growth groups and a cap on new construction that faces a test this fall at the ballot box. Park Cattle's push for a planned community adds an interesting and timely wrinkle.

Their plan is not an insult, no mockery, no travesty. They propose to keep those gorgeous pastures west of 395 along the Carson River pretty much open, and place a neighborhood on the east side of Minden where subdivisions already ring their land on three sides. If this were a jigsaw puzzle, the piece would be an easy fit.

Park Cattle Co's plan accounts for flooding, and helps with that problem in the surrounding neighborhoods. They offer school land, parks, college space, long public access to the Carson River – and as many as 5,000 homes built at an average of 200 a year for the next quarter of a century. They would not build themselves, but sell properties according to the plan they work out with the county.

There is a real attempt, being mindful of the community's wariness about overbuilding paradise, to balance community values and the company's desire to develop its land. They offer a blueprint for the future of some key land, particularly along the river.

If this column so far sounds like an endorsement, rest assured, it's not. Five-thousand is an awful lot of homes, no matter how long they take to build or how carefully tucked into existing city they wind up. Carson Valley is special precisely because it hasn't been built over, yet, but suburban-tract Reno lurks just a few valleys away. The threat is real.

Development indeed is something to worry about here, from the standpoint of too much as well as not enough for the community to thrive.

There is a point in a small community when the critical-mass ideal for culture, shopping, recreational, medical, educational and governmental amenities at low cost tips too far. That's what the refugees from California megalopolises fear so much, having seeing this firsthand.

Smalltown businesses, including the local newspaper, do best when the feel of the community remains small. Our readership peaks in places where the neighbors still generally know and care about one another, where community service groups still thrive, where the children get their names in the paper for their accomplishments and enough of us know their families personally to share in their pride.

Too big and the hometown touch wanes. Too small and the next generation will have a difficult time being able to afford to live in their own hometown. Business struggles, government struggles, what we count on as quality of life standards diminish. We're getting a taste of this now in the current economic cycle.

The questions about growth are not black and white, as often painted here and elsewhere. There is a sweet spot between too little and too much; we can hit home runs for this community's best future. We just have to be smart about it.

The debate over Park Ranch Co.'s proposal will no doubt range from well reasoned to ridiculous.

The community will be better served with thoughtful, factual and logical analysis of the plans as they move and change, from whichever viewpoint taken. The critics will have much more credibility if they can refrain from kneejerk references to Satan or otherwise load their arguments with a lot of emotional baggage and exaggeration. That goes equally for too-eager proponents hard-pressed to find a flaw in any opportunity to build.

Some won't be able to help themselves, of course. But I'm confident that most people here can sort through the chaff that every big public debate inspires and give careful thought to Park Ranch's proposal.

This one matters to the future of Carson Valley.

Don Rogers, publisher of The Record-Courier, can be reached at 782-5121, ext. 208, or [drogers@recordcourier.com](mailto:drogers@recordcourier.com).