

## **Perspective: Balanced communities key to future growth in S.J. County**

**By Carol J. Ornelas**  
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The Sept. 1 opinion piece from John Beckman of the Building Industry Association, "Small, vocal group in S.J. seeks fewer single-family homes," misrepresents the growth in the San Joaquin Valley and how we can turn our region around after one of the worst economic recessions in our history.

We should be seeking lessons from this recession and asking ourselves, "Why was the San Joaquin Valley the No. 1 region for foreclosures in the nation?" The Valley is changing. We cannot continue to grow in the same fashion as we did before.

With all due respect, Beckman's assessment for continued single-family housing is short-sighted. Shame on all of us if we did not learn from the housing crisis that we are still recovering from. Do we want to do this again? I would hope not. Not one person can say they were not affected by the housing fiasco that created the temporary demise of our economy.

As a builder I often ask myself, "What did we do wrong? What are we going to do differently? How are we going to build a stronger future for our Valley?"

These three questions should guide our planning for the next generation. We need balanced communities that are diverse and provide a range of home choices - single-family homes, condominiums, apartments and townhomes - that people of all incomes can realistically afford.

John Beckman states that more single-family housing demand is on the rise. The reality is that 51 percent of those who purchased single-family housing during the housing bubble lost their homes to foreclosures and are now renters.

This is not to say that single-family housing is obsolete; it is not. Many will continue to choose to live in a single-family home. However, new housing options also will be needed as our Valley diversifies for those who would prefer a different choice. We need to build successful communities where residents can thrive, not communities of commuters who spend on hours every day on the road.

Now is the time for a serious conversation about the future of the unique communities that we call home.

To promote this conversation, the San Joaquin Council of Governments has provided four scenarios that provide alternative visions for how our communities will grow, and the transportation investments to support that growth. Of these, Scenario D would best strengthen our economy, clean our air, and provide everyone with better choices and economic opportunities. In Scenario D, half of new homes built by 2040 would be single-family, while the other half would be apartments, condominiums, and townhomes.

Investing in our downtowns will breathe life into our communities. Many downtowns now are full of vacant lots and empty buildings. Scenario D envisions greatest revitalization of downtown Stockton and Lodi.

Saving families money boosts the economy. More residents in our county severely overpay for housing than the statewide average. When 43 percent of homeowners and 49 percent of renters pay over half of their income on housing alone, the entire economy suffers. Building a wider range of housing choices in walkable neighborhoods near workplaces and public transit will help families save money.

There is wide support for Scenario D in our community. Groups like the American Lung Association, American Farmland Trust, Catholic Charities, and the Coalition for Clean Air have rallied behind Scenario D. They agree that business as usual sprawl can't continue if we want to safeguard our economic future, agricultural heritage, and children's health.

We are committed to working to build a San Joaquin County that responds to the needs of all residents. We need to plan better than we have in the past, or we will lose what makes us special.

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