

POSITION PAPER: GROWTH IN ESCONDIDO AND SAN DIEGO COUNTY

How Does Growth Impact You? Are you aware that your tax dollars are subsidizing wealthy developers of major housing projects? These new projects bring along other strip, commercial or industrial developments. So, who pays for the long-term upkeep of new and existing roads, schools, and traffic gridlock on our freeways? Our taxpayer dollars pay for costs that the developers and builders do not cover with impact fees.

According to the San Diego Association of Government's (SANDAG'S) population forecast, they are expecting an increase in population, up to approximately 1,000,000 people in the San Diego Region, over the next twenty years. Is this too many people to be supported?

The public agencies that are responsible for measuring and addressing the negative cumulative impacts on our pocket books and quality of life are failing to do their jobs. Our open space is disappearing. The maintenance and upkeep of our roads, schools, safety, and recreation are diminishing. The developments individually and collectively impact our water availability and quality, streets, roads, freeways, mass transit, sewage, and the overall quality of our lives.

Impact Fees. Impact fees are collected in cities across California. Impact fee's are collected in 18 cities and in the county of San Diego itself from developers to pay for a portion of the costs to support new infrastructure. In the State of California, the average development impact fees per single family home is approximately \$31,000.¹ In Escondido, the impact fee is capped at \$25,000. But, this amount does not accurately represent the actual costs of growth. Adequate fees are not collected from the developers to maintain courts, jails, transportation, open space and recreation, health and social services facilities.

¹ California Building Industry Association (CBIA).

The result of collecting insufficient fees may be seen in the traffic congestion and condition on our streets, roads and freeways. Our children are forced to learn in old, overcrowded and makeshift trailer classrooms. These are undesirable learning environments. Today's water levels are insufficient to accommodate our current population. As we grow exponentially the water needs will be further unsustainable.

These and other quality-of-life indicators factually tell us that new development is not being required to pay for itself. Existing taxpayers are being forced by default to subsidize capital improvements, preventing local governments from paying for quality of life resources. Our children and grandchildren are not being provided opportunities to participate in cultural arts and musical events, parks and recreation, libraries and learning. Instead, our tax dollars are being redirected to subsidize new developments.

What Can We Do As Taxpayers? The history of local leadership has been one of a developer-dominated city council. This happens as a result of developers financing campaigns for government officials who support taxpayers subsidizing growth. One of the ways that officials shift the burden of taxpayers paying for growth is to pass bond measures which increase property taxes. This action may come on the heels of having closed a well-used library branch by the community. As an example, the Escondido City Council is currently proposing the passage of a bond measure to pay for a new library in Grape Day Park. Local city governments lack the political will and foresight to change the paradigm from unsustainable, irresponsible, unmeasured, and unpaid-for growth.

What should we demand as concerned taxpayers to fix this problem?

It's critical to consider taking action in the three following areas:

- 1) **Fees.** Demand that sufficient development impact fees be collected to maintain our quality of life standards. To determine the amount of the fees

required to pay for the total impact of growth, our elected representatives should first measure where we stand today. For example, we need to know per capita: the number of police and firefighters and response times per incident; library books/internet access and acreage of park land and open space.

City officials responsible for the approval of development should ensure there is a direct connection between the amount of impact fees collected and the needs of the community. To do otherwise will negatively impact taxpayer checkbooks. An accurate financial impact analysis is crucial. As taxpayers, we must hold city officials accountable for their relationships with the development interests. We need to prevent officials from reducing impact fees charged to developers which shifts the burden to taxpayers' pocket books.

- 2) **Maintain Proposition S.** Proposition S, known as the Growth Management and Neighborhood Protection Act, should be maintained and followed as passed by the voters in 1998. This popular policy measure essentially requires a vote of the citizens to increase zoning density. We must therefore be vigilant to assure that development projects come within the Proposition S requirements and the density is not increased without the vote of the citizens.
- 3) **General Plans.** Every city and county has adopted a General Plan which is a blueprint for land use. This master plan sets aside sufficient farm land and designates open space acreage which is intended to protect the residents from urban sprawl and over-population. This is accomplished by setting aside sufficient land to accommodate necessary growth while assuring that urban sprawl will not overflow into areas of the city that have been deemed unsupportable for development. Therefore, we need to maintain the integrity of general plans.

To summarize, it is important to understand how much growth costs the taxpayers. There is a general misconception that growth increases the tax base enabling cities to support a better quality of life. This could not be further from the truth as we have seen the impact fees collected are never sufficient to pay for infrastructure. And, the burden is overwhelmingly shifted to the taxpayers. While developers pay for a portion of the initial capital improvements, it is never enough to pay for the maintenance and staffing needed to maintain our infrastructure.

What's Next? The Escondido Chamber of Citizens (ECOC) would like you to fill out a questionnaire regarding growth. In the near future, a link will be provided for you to fill it out. Furthermore, the ECOC will begin to focus on key areas of growth regarding development impact fees, water, quality of life, Escondido's General Plan application towards the review and approval of development projects, Proposition S and other related topics. In learning about the myriad of issues surrounding growth, it's in our best interest to learn as much as possible. In upcoming elections, it's also important to learn about the candidates and their view towards growth.

