



Planning for future of Ventura County

By Ron Bottorff, Mary Ann Krause
Sunday, May 31, 2009

Ventura County is known throughout California, and indeed the entire west, as a county that has successfully limited the sprawl-type development that has characterized much of our state, in spite of being perched on the edge of a major and rapidly growing metropolitan area. By doing so, it has also protected most of the open space and agricultural lands surrounding its cities. This has been accomplished through a series of policy measures over the last several decades, from the Guidelines for Orderly Development in the late 1960s through the SOAR urban-growth boundary initiatives, which were adopted by the county and eight out of 10 cities in the late 1990s.

But Ventura County continues to experience the same growing population and housing pressures as the rest of the state. Although these pressures are now reduced because of the slowed economy, they will in all probability return in the years ahead, perhaps with even more fervor to meet pent-up demand. Additionally, the various city and county Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources boundaries will begin to expire in the next 10 years, and as expiration approaches, new pressures will be placed on currently protected lands. New state and federal requirements for limiting greenhouse gas emissions will increasingly constrain and shape the manner in which our region develops.

County residents now have a unique window of opportunity to develop a vision for our future and to put in place a set of policies and standards for building sustainable communities that minimizes our climate footprint, increases our food and energy security, promotes a robust economy, enhances social equity and protects large, contiguous areas of natural habitat, wildlife corridors and working farmland.

The Ventura County Civic Alliance, an initiative of the Ventura County Community Foundation, has been working to promote a more sustainable future for the Ventura County area since our inception as a regional civic collaborative in 2001. The Alliance works to approach sustainability via the “three Es” — the Economy, the Environment, and social Equity, in a process of identifying key regional challenges and solutions for our future.

Currently, we have three working groups pursuing projects for approaching sustainability. The first, which we will cover in this essay, is the Compact for a Sustainable Ventura County (Compact). Two other Alliance working groups are Livable Communities and Workforce Education. The projects being undertaken by those groups will be the subject of future essays.

Compact for sustainable V.C.

The goal of the Compact is to create a blueprint for the future of Ventura County that embodies each of the three Es and which results in a set of goals, policies and standards that are collaboratively negotiated and voluntarily adopted by all the region’s jurisdictions, including county and city governments. At its core is a process of broad civic engagement to identify common values, develop a shared vision and establish policies and commitments to action that are supported by residents, businesses, civic leaders and policymakers alike.

The first phase of the Compact was launched in June 2007 in partnership with the Ventura Council of Governments and the Southern California Association of Governments, which provided funding and consultant support for the first phase of the project.

Phase 1 of the project brought together community members from around the county in three workshops to consider and describe alternative future scenarios for the county based on alternative patterns of residential, commercial and transportation development. These workshops reaffirmed participants' commitment to protecting open space and agricultural lands surrounding our communities, and pointed to key policy issues that must be addressed in order to achieve that goal, including urban infill and redevelopment utilizing leading-edge green building and Livable Communities principles; permanent open-space and farmland preservation; and rethinking transportation investments. For more detail on Phase 1, visit <http://www.vccivicalliance.org> and see the full report, which was granted a Compass Blueprint Award for Sustainability by the Southern California Association of Governments.

Compact Phase 2

Phase 2 has now begun and will continue into 2010. Funding for this phase will be provided by SCAG, in continuation of its support for Phase 1, and also by a grant to the Alliance from Common Sense California. For this phase, the Ventura County Transportation Commission and the City-County Planners Association will join VCOG, SCAG and the Alliance as partners in the project.

The goal of Phase 2 is to obtain feedback from both residents and government entities that can be used in creating a set of Principles of Agreement that will shape the future of the region. Achieving this goal will involve activities around three critical objectives:

1. Educate stakeholders and residents about the implications of several alternate future scenarios and solicit community input and feedback on those scenarios. This will be accomplished through a series of interactive local forums, meetings with community groups and mass media, including online activity and The Star.
2. Build community consensus around a common vision for the future. Community input will be aimed at developing a "preferred future" for the region, which will be reviewed and refined through a series of meetings with an array of community groups and leaders, including city and county governments, business groups, grass-roots environmental and social-justice organizations.
3. Define key policies and actions to achieve the vision. The key stakeholder groups described above will begin to map out a shared vision by evaluating the options identified in both Phases 1 and 2 and establishing the key policies and standards that will form the basis of the Principles of Agreement. These will need to cover three major areas: 1) community design, 2) land conservation and environmental protection, and 3) transportation and economic development.

We encourage Star readers to stay tuned as the Compact Phase 2 unfolds and public meetings are announced. Also, look for future reports on the Alliance's Livable Communities and Workforce Education projects here and on our Web site <http://www.vccf.org/civicalliance/>.

At the Civic Alliance, we believe that by working together, we can bridge the natural boundaries between the 3Es. We know that creating a common vision of how Ventura County can grow and keep its special character, open space, unique landscape and a healthy economy requires all the stakeholders to participate in the planning and dialogue so that what is proposed does truly reflect a community consensus. We believe this can be accomplished in Ventura County, and we look forward to the partnerships that can make it happen.

— *Ron Bottorff of Newbury Park and Mary Ann Krause of Santa Paula co-chair the Compact Working Group of the Ventura County Civic Alliance.*



© 2009 Ventura County Star