

Homebuilder offers smog-eating tile roofs

The Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES -- A Los Angeles-based homebuilder is offering environmentally concerned Southern Californians smog-eating tile roofs.

KB Home tested the concrete tile roof, which neutralizes smog-forming nitrogen oxides spewed by vehicles, last summer in the Mojave Desert community of Lancaster. After an enthusiastic response, KB home began offering the smog-eating roofs in January in its Southern California developments, including about 25 in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

The Riverside Press-Enterprise says the green roof feature comes standard in some projects, but it's mostly offered as an average \$800 upgrade.

Irvine-based Boral Roofing says a typical smog-eating roof can annually break down the same amount of nitrogen oxides as a car's engine typically produces during 10,800 miles of driving. The magic ingredient in the tiles is titanium dioxide.

Fresno Co. supervisors OK Friant Ranch project

By Kurtis Alexander

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, February 2, 2011

My wife and I are among the many residents of Friant who strongly favor the proposed Friant Ranch project. We heartily and urgently encourage the Fresno County Supervisors' approval.

The economic benefit to the local economy and to those who live in Friant could be significant, resulting in attractively designed homes, new businesses, non-polluting electric vehicles, miles of walking trails and public transportation linkage.

This could help remove the term "blighted" from Friant's reputation. Few places remain in the county as recreationally oriented as this river and lake community and as historically rich, dating back to the 1850s.

Fresno County supervisors on Tuesday gave the go-ahead to the 2,500-home Friant Ranch community, laying the foundation for another residential development in the now-rural hills northeast of Fresno.

Project developer Dennis Bacopulos said Friant Ranch will be an upscale community for active adults. Describing shops akin to Fresno's Fig Garden Village and year-round recreation at nearby lakes and parks, Bacopulos said the development will compare to exclusive retirement destinations in Arizona and Southern California.

"We're looking forward to getting started and serving the senior community," he said shortly after the board's decision.

The 3-1 vote amends the county's general plan to accommodate the project and certifies the required environmental report. Supervisor Susan Anderson voted no and Supervisor Judy Case was absent.

The development still needs other permits before proceeding and, according to Bacopulos, probably is a decade from completion.

Tuesday's hearing drew a few dozen opponents, who raised several concerns that have dogged the project since it first was proposed seven years ago. Most notable is fear of unbridled growth along the San Joaquin River banks in the region about 10 miles from Fresno's northern edge.

"The urban sprawl creates air pollution and leapfrog communities that are not walkable or easily accessible," said Michelle Garcia, air quality director for the Fresno-Madera Medical Society.

Garcia was among several who said the development would spark longer commutes and add to auto emissions in the Valley.

"When I hear about the amount of pollution that's going to go into our air, I have to say 'Will somebody stand up for our children?' " added David Roberts, a Fresno resident.

The Bigelow-Silkwood family, which is spearheading the development on family land, has dismissed the notion of sprawl. Family members say Friant Ranch will enhance the economically struggling town of 800.

Several Friant residents attended Tuesday's meeting to support the project.

"It represents a lot of hope," said Friant resident Jeff Roberts, anticipating that development will bring new business and new life to the sleepy town. Roberts, a vice president at Fresno developer Granville Homes, added: "The highest and best use [now] becomes an auto storage yard or a boat storage yard or a marijuana shop."

Attorney Bryan Wagner, representing the Bigelow-Silkwood family, says the family is aware of air quality concerns and will make efforts to limit automobile pollution in the subdivision. Among them: linking the community with public transportation and building shops in the development to serve residents and discourage drives to Fresno.

The city of Fresno is among the opponents of the plan, citing concerns in a recent letter to the county that developments like Friant Ranch violate a shared city-county goal of smart growth.

The county's environmental community also has taken issue with how sewage will be handled, worrying that effluent could seep into the river and harm recovering salmon runs.

To address that concern, the Bigelow-Silkwood family has agreed to treat all effluent on site. And on Tuesday, county supervisors added a condition that no wastewater be discharged into the river.

The concessions were not enough for Robert Merrill, an emeritus professor of geology at California State University, Fresno, who said given the terrain, wastewater would inevitably flow underground to the San Joaquin.

Following the board's vote, Supervisor Anderson explained that she did not join the majority because they did not affirm county support for the San Joaquin River Parkway plan, which contains terms for protecting the river corridor.

Anderson, though, said she thinks the Bigelow-Silkwood family will prove good stewards of the nearby countryside.

In addition to homes, the 942-acre Friant Ranch calls for a community center and a village with commercial and retail space. Several hundred acres will be set aside as open space.

Bacopulos said he hopes to break ground in three years and build in phases over the next 10 years.

The project is not likely to qualify for a county economic-stimulus program that waives environmental fees for developers, county officials said Tuesday.

The ordinance expires in less than two years and Friant Ranch building permits are not likely to be approved in that time, officials said.

Council approves sustainability plan

By Tracy Press staff

Tracy Press, late Tuesday, February 1, 2011

By unanimous vote, the City Council adopted a plan that should help Tracy meet state requirements for greenhouse gas emissions and future development.

At its meeting earlier tonight, the council amended the general plan — the city's principal growth document — to reduce the area of land it foresees developing over the next 30 years.

The council also ratified the sustainability action plan, what planning manager Bill Dean described

as a comprehensive directory of measures, goals and options that will reduce the city's carbon footprint.

The sustainability plan, Dean said, was a reaction to a trio of state laws — Assembly Bill 32, Senate Bill 97 and Senate Bill 375 — that force cities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, report the levels of those emissions and make sure new growth is as close and linked as possible to existing development.

The council's approval, Dean and others said, puts Tracy at the forefront of California cities, all of which must find a way to comply with the mandate from Sacramento. Tracy is one of the farthest along in the process, said Tracy resident and architect Christina Frankel, who congratulated the city for its progress but warned that the plan was not enough to truly make an impact. She stressed that a bigger focus must be placed on land management for the city to meet its goals.

"We need to not be afraid of density," she said. "We have to build closer together."

But Dean explained that it was the city's goal to balance environmental demands with the needs of businesses.

"It can't be punitive," he said, emphasizing that the actions called for in the plan are flexible. Not every development will be required to meet every item in the lengthy document, Dean said.

Mayor Brent Ives described the sustainability plan as a careful compromise between protecting the environment and meeting the needs of businesses and developers.

"This carefully walks down the middle," he said.