

Word on the Street: Lawn-care company goes green

Doug Ambrose uses only battery-powered equipment.

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, Apr. 01, 2012

Doug Ambrose's new lawn-care company prides itself on being good for the environment. And he isn't just talking about getting rid of the weeds in your yard.

Ambrose created Healthy Air Lawn Care, a company that uses only battery-powered equipment. Nothing Ambrose operates to mow a lawn or blow leaves spews harmful pollutants such as carbon monoxide.

Although Ambrose knows he is competing against a legion of gardeners, he hopes to attract customers who are concerned about the Valley's poor air quality.

"Think about all the gas blowers, lawn mowers and string trimmers that operate every day and the amount of pollution they contribute," Ambrose said. "We provide another option."

Ambrose said that not only is his equipment pollution-free, it's also much quieter than gas-powered equipment.

He also says he is comparably priced with other gardeners in the area.

"People don't always like to switch to a new gardener, but I am trying to get them to see the bigger picture," Ambrose said. "People can make a difference by not contributing to our air-quality problems."

For more information about Healthy Air Lawn Care, visit the company's website at healthyairlawncare.com or call (559) 416-2493.

[Fresno Bee column, Monday, April 2, 2012:](#)

Can Fresno council stand up to developers?

By Bill McEwen

Building a city right requires fact-finding, expertise, imagination and, most of all, political courage.

Now, after the formation of a citizens committee, 12 community workshops and a citywide telephone survey, we're about to see if the City Council has the backbone to stand up to developers seeking more Fresno sprawl.

The test comes 5 p.m. Thursday when the council selects one of five options for the 10-year update to the 2025 General Plan.

The Planning Commission last month unanimously approved "Alternative A," which would add 76,000 housing units. Thirty-nine thousand of the new residences would be in existing neighborhoods and 37,000 in planned growth areas.

But two days before the Planning Commission vote, developers unveiled their ideas during a citizen committee and community workshop at Dailey Elementary Charter School. A Building Industry Association executive then presented "Alternative E" to the Planning Commission.

Besides being late to the party, developers are seeking to repeat past mistakes. Their plan calls for 79,000 new residences, with 28,000 downtown or on infill lots. Fifty-one thousand would be in growth areas, including 14,500 outside Fresno's current planned growth area.

For the developers, it's about profit. It's cheaper and easier to build on the fringe -- never mind the drain on the city's ability to pay for police officers, firefighters and parks.

You can expect City Manager Mark Scott, who is interim planning director, to urge the council to withstand developer lobbying.

"There are lots of housing opportunities south of Shaw," Scott says. "We want to make sure that we don't weaken efforts to bolster that part of town.

"We've been able to stabilize neighborhoods, but we certainly can't afford to lose any more. It's a lot less expensive to keep a neighborhood healthy than it is to lose it and try to bring it back."

Strengthening the Planning Commission's and Scott's case for Alternative A: analysis shows that it would be most beneficial for taxpayers because new homes would piggyback on infrastructure already in place. And the police and fire departments wouldn't have to stretch as far to provide services.

This option provides developers what they want -- the ability to build new subdivisions of single-family homes on 6,000 square-foot lots. But they would have to settle for building fewer of them.

There were days when getting the council to bend to their will was a slam dunk for developers. They ran Fresno top to bottom -- even if it required breaking the law.

But there's a budding new calculus. Community organizers have drawn residents into the planning process. About 600 people showed up at the Exhibit Hall for a meeting about the General Plan update. Activists such as the Rev. Sharon Stanley and Edie Jessup have explained to people why planning matters. And the city's telephone survey indicated that folks across the economic spectrum are concerned about unhealthy air.

Council members must tread more carefully. They can't simply repeat the "jobs" mantra and let developers build where they have land options or bought long ago.

What's needed Thursday is a frank discussion about Fresno come 2035. Will there be thriving neighborhoods in the heart of the city? Or will Fresno again grow by abandoning the urban core?

Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, April 3, 2012:

A new planning strategy

On April 5, the Fresno City Council has the opportunity to approve the City of Fresno General Plan update to 2035, specifically Alternative A, as recommended unanimously by the Planning Commission.

Alternative A represents a new direction for our city by allowing for an increased population density, to be accomplished in part by infill development rather than continued suburban sprawl.

Alternative A stresses compact and complete neighborhoods, where people obtain most of their daily needs within one mile, thus reducing auto dependency and long drives. This design is centered around neighborhood schools, and neighborhood shopping centers along with local parks, all with pedestrian and bicycle connections.

By choosing this design, our city could achieve cleaner air, conserve agricultural land, consume less water per capita, be more energy efficient, while moving toward a more sustainable future. Creating more family-friendly and complete neighborhoods might also help revitalize downtown.

Our city planning staff, funded by taxpayers, has given us a chance for a more livable Fresno. It's now time for the City Council to follow this expert advice, and we as citizens and voters to challenge individual council members to support Alternative A, rather than continuing business as usual.

Robert Merrill, Fresno