

Thursday November 20th, The Bakersfield Californian

## **Sierra Club sounds off on tract projects at meeting**

Presentation about air quality, traffic prompts planning director rebuttal

By JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer

Representatives of the local chapter of the Sierra Club spoke out against two tracts of homes before the Bakersfield Planning Commission Thursday night.

Homes pollute the air and clog roads, said Gordon Nipp.

He said homes need to be equipped with solar power strips, charged a fee to pay for eliminating air pollution and studied to make sure the surrounding traffic patterns will work.

His arguments and demands aren't new. The Sierra Club has raised them against five other projects over the past year.

The Sierra Club's opposition to those five projects -- all located in northeast Bakersfield -- have heralded environmental lawsuits against three of the five projects.

On Thursday night, the Sierra Club stepped away from that northeast focus. One of the two projects they raised concerns about was in southwest Bakersfield. The other also was in the northeast.

Nipp and Sierra Club speaker Arthur Unger raised their concerns against the revision of a tract of 347 single-family homes in the southwest, north of Panama Lane and east of Old River Road in southwest Bakersfield.

Their presentation to the commission prompted a counterstrike from Planning Director Stan Grady.

Grady showed commissioners a chart of San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District Data that indicates that the local air quality has been steadily getting better for the past 20 years.

In that time, Grady said, the city of Bakersfield has grown by 133 percent.

"You are hearing that growth is going to kill your children," Grady said. "This chart shows that exactly the opposite is true."

But Nipp said that growth is very clearly polluting the air.

"From this one particular project the impact is trivial," he said.

"But we're going to build probably 4,000 houses in this year alone. When you figure out the air quality impact from 20,000 houses that is not insignificant."

Grady said that most of the air pollution the Sierra Club is complaining about is actually pollution from cars.

"Somehow there's a belief that there is a connection between homes and tail-pipe emissions," he said.

But he said vehicle pollution is regulated by other government agencies and the city shouldn't be asked to clean up car pollution by denying new tracts of homes.

But Nipp said as growth pushes homes farther and farther from the city's center a car produces more pollution as it makes longer and longer trips through the city.

Nipp and Unger also spoke out against a tract of 139 homes at Highway 184 and Mesa Marin Drive near Mesa Marin Raceway.

Both tract maps were approved unanimously by the planning commission. One commissioner, Jeff Tkac, was absent.

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## **Governor's order halts proposed air and water quality rules**

By JENNIFER COLEMAN, Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO (AP) - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's order to halt all pending regulations will delay proposed rules on power plants, air quality and water conserving appliances, state officials said Thursday.

The governor's second executive order, issued Monday, gave state agencies, boards, commissions and departments a week to inventory all pending regulations. The proposed rules will be stalled for up to six months while the new administration reviews them for their effect on businesses.

About 85 regulations will be stalled, although Schwarzenegger's aides said they didn't know which would be frozen. In some cases, the freezes could conflict with Schwarzenegger's campaign pledges to preserve California's environment, as they stop regulations created by laws aiming to improving air quality and reducing the state's use of water.

Among the regulations that state departments said would be stopped:

- Recent changes that relaxed the zero-emission vehicle regulations that car manufacturers sought because they said the original rule was too expensive.
- Rules about importing transgenic tropical fish to California pet stores and home aquariums. The Fish and Game Commission was set to consider an exemption to the state's ban on genetically altered fish next month, but that would mean amending state regulations that restrict ownership only to research facilities.
- Proposed rules that would allow industrial businesses to go off the grid and build their own power supplies.

The order also slow air quality regulations for some diesel engines, allowing higher levels of pollution, said Shannon Eddy, an air quality representative for Sierra Club California. "I don't think anyone would agree that we should put these public health regulations on hold."

Energy Commission spokeswoman Claudia Chandler said her office pulled back proposed water efficiency standards for residential washing machines that will eventually save up to 6,000 gallons of water each year per washing machine, Chandler said.

After state agencies review the regulations, they'll be prioritized "to ensure that no federal funding is imperiled," said Margita Thompson, the governor's press secretary. The administration will also put public safety regulations at the top of the list for review, she said.

The California Chamber of Commerce applauded the governor's order, saying it would allow the state to balance economic interests with protection of the environment.

The state is required to consider a proposed regulation's economic affect, but that has been largely ignored in recent years, said Fred Main, the chamber's senior vice president.

In particular, he said, when rules on ergonomics were being crafted, "it was very difficult to get the concerns of the business community before the department."

Schwarzenegger also ordered a review of the last five years' worth of regulations, which spokesman Vince Sollitto said was vital to the governor's agenda of improving the economic and business climate in California.

"The review is to assess the impact on a variety of factors, including the economic climate, the ability to foster jobs and economic growth," he said, but not that the administration will reopen regulations already on the books.

If that happened, however, the California Healthcare Association wouldn't mind.

The trade group for California hospitals fought the recently approved nurse-to-patient staffing ratios, which were approved by the Legislature and signed by then-Gov. Gray Davis in 1999.

The association also took issue with the final regulations, which are set to take effect Jan. 1. The state Department of Health Services estimated the new ratios will cost hospitals \$422 million next year, and the costs will rise to \$956 million in 2008, when all of the ratios have been put in place.

"We have had concerns about the night-shift requirements, and the fact that the regulations require continuous compliance - every minute," said Jan Emerson, vice president of external affairs for the association.

That will require hospitals to have enough staff to allow nurses to take breaks, she said. If they don't have enough nurses, they may have to close some wards.

The association isn't seeking a wholesale rewriting of the rules, Emerson said, but would like to see rules that are "reasonable, yet avoid a wholesale shutdown" of patient care if hospitals can't find enough nurses.

The Schwarzenegger administration "has asked for input about what our concerns are, as they did from other stakeholders, I'm sure," Emerson said.

The California Nurses Association, the union representing about 55,000 registered nurses, wasn't asked for input, said spokesman Chuck Idelson, but the union sent the new governor a letter urging him to keep the regulations as they are.

In the four years since the bill was signed, the Department of Health Services held public hearings, took written testimony and conducted its own study to craft the regulations, Idelson said.

The hospitals have "had a full public airing of these issues," he said. "We don't think it's necessary or appropriate for there to be additional changes."

[Friday, November 21, Editorial in The Fresno Bee](#)

## **Connecting the dots**

The transportation forum held in downtown Fresno on Wednesday was chock-full of facts, figures, projections and predictions, and it was leavened with some lively exchanges on the future of Measure C, the county's half-cent sales tax for transportation needs. It was enough to fill several reporter's notebooks by the end of the day. But the best thing about the forum may have been the fact that it happened at all.

The event was sponsored by the Council of Fresno County Governments, and brought together a wide array of local and regional experts and officials with experience and responsibilities in the areas of transportation, land use planning and air quality.

Gathering such people together in one room is a great idea. The human tendency to compartmentalize, to focus narrowly on our own immediate needs and goals, runs through our institutions as deeply it runs through individuals. The press of daily tasks often keeps us gazing intently at the trees and missing the fact of the forest.

But when people have a chance to get together and share their knowledge -- and their passions for the conclusions they draw from that knowledge -- new thinking and new strategies begin to emerge.

Nowhere is this more crucial than in these three areas. Transportation, land use and air quality are inextricably intertwined. Every decision made in one sphere affects the others. We have been slow in some quarters to come to that understanding, and those who have achieved it also have a strong obligation to spread the word to every part of the larger community.

For example, the proposed high-speed rail system holds much promise for economic development in the Valley, but such trains would also get many people out of their cars for longer trips, and that would make our air better. Good planning -- the sort that eschews the sprawl of the past and brings us closer together -- will also have an impact on air quality by reducing the distances that people must travel while about on their business. Improved air quality will make this a more attractive place to live, making it more attractive for existing businesses to stay and

enticing new ones to come. That spurs economic development, which will help pay for new infrastructure designed with a healthy environment in mind.

It all fits together, and it was gratifying to see so many bright minds gathered in one place to discuss that fact. Spread the word.

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## Opinions

"My sense is that annexation is not the main issue anymore. The main issue is that we need to continue talking to each other. I'd like to see the ad hoc (annexation) committee stay together, but instead of talking about annexation, let's identify our main issues -- water, sewers, planning. ... If we can solve our regional problems, I think annexation will happen as a natural end to this process."

-- Deborah Hand

*Tehachapi City Councilwoman. She was commenting on the action of the City Council to table plans to annex Golden Hills in the immediate future.*

"I think pollution is more important than the comfort of my home. If everybody does what they want, pollution is going to get worse."

-- Gerry Collis

*Northeast Bakersfield resident, commenting on the first day this week that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had power to enforce the temporary ban on use of fireplaces and wood stoves.*

"We're the first agency in California to have a fully integrated (computer) system. It is a huge time saver."

-- Phil Clarke

*Bakersfield police lieutenant. He was referring to the Police Department's recently completed a \$4 million, multiyear project to update its computer records systems. Vehicle-mounted computers are now linked to the records system.*