

Details on *Watsonville Pilots Association et al. v. City of Watsonville et al.*

Using the community-generated land use plans as a guide, Fregonese Associates developed land use alternatives in greater detail. The land use alternatives focused on new development in Watsonville's downtown, along its transit corridors, and in three "greenfield" locations with little agricultural value: Manabe-Burgstrom (undeveloped land well suited for industrial and commercial growth), Atkinson (undeveloped land well suited for residential growth) and Buena Vista (an *inhabited* area with large lots or "ranchettes"). Alternatives for each area were reviewed at community meetings attended primarily by residents who lived in or around each area. At these meetings, strong support was heard for development downtown and along transit corridors and, for the most part, in Manabe-Burgstrom and Atkinson.

In Buena Vista, however, residents strongly opposed urbanization – especially at the highest densities under consideration. Growth projections for Watsonville were estimated to add 5,700 dwelling units to the 13,500 units counted in 2003. Buena Vista, the largest of the greenfield growth areas, was expected to accommodate over 2,000 units – a third of all growth. Unlike the other greenfield areas, Buena Vista had constituents with a strong interest in maintaining their semi-rural lifestyle, and the amount of change proposed for Buena Vista was considerable. Buena Vista was outside of the city limits when Measure U passed, and Measure U brought Buena Vista in as a compact development opportunity. As a result, many Buena Vista residents expressed dismay at the area being considered as an expansion area in the first place.

Nevertheless, workshop results were mixed, with none of the three land use alternatives being a clear favorite. One option retained the land use restrictions associated with the airport runway and two options did not, all of the options showed significant changes from the 10-acre ranchette pattern in Buena Vista that was currently in place. The Advisory Committee was also divided on which option to choose for Buena Vista but, at the advice of City staff, recommended the denser option to the City Council because it made the densities of the other growth areas more market feasible.

At the Buena Vista workshop, concerns were raised over an assumption that a secondary runway at the nearby airport would be closed to allow for additional density. The City operated with the understanding that it had authority over runway operations and associated land use, a supposition that would become the principle argument in a legal challenge of the General Plan after it was adopted.¹

The General Plan developed by Fregonese Associates was adopted in 2006, and was broadly supported – except for in the Buena Vista area, where proposed urbanization was opposed by Buena Vista residents and the pilots who use Watsonville's airport. Shortly after the Plan was adopted the Watsonville Pilots Association sued the City, holding that the City did not have the authority to reduce operations (to increase densities in Buena Vista), and that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan failed to analyze an alternative that would permit no change in airport operations. The suit also held that traffic impacts in the larger region had not been sufficiently considered by the EIR. In 2010, a California appellate court agreed. As a consequence, Watsonville rescinded the 2006 General Plan and engaged pilots and residents to arrive at a new land use plan for the Buena Vista area. All other policies in the 2006 Plan are expected to remain in the new General Plan that should be ready for adoption in the summer of 2012.

¹ For information on lawsuit and court decision, see summary by Meyers Nave Riback Silver & Wilson, A Professional Law Corporation, <http://www.meyersnave.com/publications/city-watsonvilles-general-plan-update-violated-state-aeronautics-act-and-eir-violated-c>