

Santolina development isn't the threat opponents claim

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Commission



It is important for the public to know why I and others support thoughtful, well-planned developments in Bernalillo County, such as the proposed Santolina development. It is important that the county “get the facts out” and dispel the distortions and misinformation being spread by opponents, most notably a group referring to itself as WTF – “What’s The Future.”

Strong planning, standards and accountability efforts should determine what the future of Bernalillo County and the city of Albuquerque should look like. Presently, Santolina fits this model as a master-planned residential and commercial development.

Because growth is inevitable, I consider Santolina to be appropriate progress for our county because we will determine what the development will ultimately become. Conversely, why would we allow our future to be that of unplanned, smaller hodgepodge growth?

By potentially denying Santolina or others like it, we send the message that new residents are not welcome here. This notion is not realistic because the population will grow and development will occur. Not properly planning for the needed homes, places to work, shop, play and learn would be short-sighted and negligent.

This 50-year project is primarily being opposed for fear of lack of water and fear of urban sprawl. It has been postulated that the development would take all available water, with our acequias and river running dry and that we would be left with no drinking or irrigating water.

The truth is this: The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, as required by the state engineer, has a water resources management strategy in place that takes future growth into account and can accommodate Santolina within the water utility’s existing water rights portfolio.

This revelation has not stopped opponents from spreading fear, especially in the South Valley, which is one of the areas I serve.

With respect to fear of urban sprawl, true urban sprawl only occurs when the growth is unplanned and uncontrolled. It is foolhardy to believe that the state’s most populous county will not continue to grow.

Besides the opponents’ concerns about available water and urban sprawl, some folks just do not want any growth, period. Often, these opponents claim that they can only support infill projects, yet there is not enough area to infill in the long term.

Infill efforts, even with reasonable and thoughtful projects, very often face stiff and aggressive opposition by those who claim to support infill growth. And then there are those residents who support infill growth as long as it is not “in my backyard.”

Should we abdicate our right to dictate how well-planned growth happens because some don’t want to see any growth at all? Bernalillo County staff has made every effort to ensure that every development project in the county’s

jurisdiction is well-planned, sustainable and attractive. County law also helps to this end by guaranteeing exhaustive public review and input.

The county is dedicated to ensuring smart growth through standards via sector plans. The alternative is to make master-planned developments so difficult to get approved that developers forego Bernalillo County and seek approvals in our neighboring counties. Should this occur, we will have absolutely no say in the elements of these developments and yet we will experience all the unplanned, unfunded repercussions related to traffic and supporting infrastructure.

Unfortunately, large unbridled developments in our neighboring counties really do fit the definition of urban sprawl and impact us today.

Should the county deny approval of the Santolina development, there is nothing to prevent the owner from selling the land in small parcels to multiple individual owners who have the right to seek any variety of smaller developments, potentially resulting in either a vast quiltwork of ununified projects at best or the well-documented situation at Pajarito Mesa at worst.

I prefer to more thoughtfully and proactively determine the destiny of Bernalillo County's unavoidable and foreseeable growth.