

San Jose Mercury News

Opinion

It can't all be a park

Santa Clara council must consider
the need for housing on 17 acres

YOU'D never know it from driving by, but right across Winchester Boulevard from Valley Fair lie 17 acres of mostly open land — long used as an agricultural research center, and now a prime location for housing.

Editorial

The opinion
of the
Mercury News

Neighbors, not surprisingly, would like to see the property become a park. Who wouldn't prefer looking over the back fence at an open field? But the Santa Clara City Council

has a bigger picture to keep in mind: the shortage of housing near Silicon Valley jobs, and the opportunity this urban site presents to help meet that need.

The state, which owns the land, decided several years ago to sell it, preferably for housing. On Tuesday night, the city council is expected to indicate what it will approve on the property.

City planners are recommending 165 senior apartments and 100 or so single detached homes on the land, while keeping four acres as open space, including an orchard that everyone would like to preserve. Unfortunately, the planning commission last week reinforced the neighbors' wish for all 17 acres to be parkland.

It's important to plan enough parks in urban areas. Keeping nearly a quarter of this site undeveloped, as planners recommend, would do that. Using it all as a park would be ridiculous.

The land is surrounded on three sides by back yards, and the fourth faces Valley Fair. A short walk away are a supermarket and a drug store. Buses run by. This is a prime location for housing.

Sites like this, known as "infill," are Silicon Valley's only alternative to sprawl, whose costs in tax dollars and highway gridlock are immense.

If anything, the city planners' housing proposal is too timid. It should include some townhouses, so that more families could live there.

Santa Clara, always rich in industry, has made admirable efforts in recent years to provide more housing. The council should continue that trend Tuesday and strike a healthy balance between homes and parkland on the Winchester site.

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Save agriculture site

YOUR editorial (Opinion, Feb. 3) regarding the 82-year-old UC Agricultural Research Center was shallow and inaccurate. It is our valley's last piece of public, agriculturally zoned land, and it should be used for the public, not turned into private housing.

We need an urban agriculture/horticulture center accessible by public transportation. We need children's gardens, horticultural therapy for seniors and the handicapped, education about chemical-free gardens and a facility for the master gardeners program.

You write that "Silicon Valley's only alternative to sprawl is infill housing." This is untrue if the city center quality is deteriorating. The agriculture center's neighborhood is short 20 acres of open space. The city's five-year housing plan does not show housing here. If carefully planned, long-term jobs such as green development

services and products could be created instead of short-term housing jobs.

Our valley is the only major metropolitan area in the nation that does not have a horticultural center. In the same year the state decided to close our center, a new one was opened solely for Ventura County with a larger budget.

You should be discussing legal problems relating to how this land was taken from us and why the state can force local governments to change our land's zoning.

Kathryn Jane Mathewson
San Jose