

Opinion - Friday, August 20, 2010

## A Staples Ranch agreement that suits everyone

by Matt Morrison

The iconoclastic Victorian author Samuel Butler wrote, "An obstinate man does not hold opinions, but they hold him; it is like a devil, only cast out with great difficulty." Perhaps it was providence then that delayed the June 15 City Council meeting for Staples Ranch because the opinion holding me was not whether we would be back in court, rather it was planning how to go about it.

The line between obstinacy and firmness is strong and decisive. The smallest share of common sense will suffice to detect it, and there is little doubt that few people pass this boundary without being conscious of the fault.

As morally firm as I felt defending the species and habitat represented on the 140-acre Staples Ranch site, the common sense fact is that projects planned for Staples Ranch look pretty good in any economic scenario, and absolutely phenomenal given the current state of affairs.

Now, our judicial system is primarily concerned with determining who's right and who's wrong. Judges have a difficult time resolving issues when arguments from both sides have merit, thus the resolutions come about slowly.

Fortunately a nexus developed around the senior complex, Continuing Life Communities. None of the parties to any Staples Ranch controversy are opposed to the senior complex. The project became a genesis to converse about how to address our other concerns and remove obstacles to the senior complex and other Staples Ranch projects.

The conversation culminated in a July meeting with all the parties from the 2009 lawsuit. Our basic goals were the appropriate mitigations for the biological resources and managing Stoneridge Drive extension. Happily, after a marathon six-hour meeting, all parties reached a tentative agreement that we are presenting to the City Council.

Biological mitigations fall into two areas. The agreement calls for Alameda County to preserve the riparian habitat of the Arroyo Mocho adjacent to Staples Ranch and to replace the riparian area from the Stoneridge Drive bridges at a 3:1 ratio. The county is also contributing to a significant purchase of open space habitat elsewhere in Alameda County to replace the upland habitat on Staples Ranch lost from construction. These mitigations both will provide benefits in perpetuity.

We understood the regional imperative to opening Stoneridge Drive through to Livermore; also the severe, unavoidable impacts from this new major thoroughfare. With the agreement we hoped to ensure that a dialogue is opened with the city and Stoneridge Drive residents by mandating at least one workshop be held in the neighborhood to detail the construction timeline, planned mitigations, etc.

By far the most important aspect of the agreement is to place a barrier on the Stoneridge Drive extension to through traffic until Jack London Boulevard is completed between Stoneridge Drive and the rest of Livermore. There is no great reason to subject the Stoneridge neighborhood to I-580 cut-through traffic before the route to Livermore is complete.

I encourage the City Council to resolve the final obstacles to developing Staples Ranch by adopting this agreement.

*Matt Morrison is a second-year law student at the University of San Francisco Law School. A 41-year resident of Pleasanton, as a youth he frequented the Staples Ranch property and Arroyo Las Positas there. In 2007 Morrison co-sponsored an initiative attempting to preserve Staples Ranch for community use and co-founded Friends of Pleasanton, which was active promoting workshops for planning Staples Ranch community and neighborhood parks. Morrison is also a party to the 2009 lawsuit and settlement over the Staples Ranch environmental documents.*