

## **The Future of Yucaipa: Bedford Falls or Pottersville?**

Kevin Miskin

My wife and I raised our five children here in Yucaipa. With its strong family values and location in the foothills at the gateway to the San Bernardino Mountains and historical Oak Glen, Yucaipa is the best kept secret in Southern California. After 22 years in Yucaipa we can say, "It's a wonderful life". A couple of months ago we received a disturbing letter from the City notifying of the development plans for the Serrano Estates on a 52-acre undeveloped parcel on the North Bench involving construction of steeply terraced, high-density cluster housing on quarter acre lots. We anticipated that it would be developed in accordance with its current zoning—RL-1. The entire North Bench is zoned for rural living on one-acre minimum lots (RL-1). At the standing room only Planning Commission and City Council Meetings that both lasted until 11:30 pm, concerned citizens expressed opposition to the plan as it violated both the Yucaipa General Plan and the Yucaipa Municipal Code.

Because the majority of the parcel is undevelopable due to hillside building restrictions, earthquake fault zones, and drainages, the developer designed 52 homes on approximately 13 acres claiming that when averaged over 52 acres the lots meet the RL-1 designation of one-acre *gross* lot size. The hook for the city? The remainder of the land, which is largely undevelopable anyway, would be designated for vineyards and open space.

The developer admitted that no aspect of rural small farm lifestyle would be allowed on the small lots, and justified this by stating that there was no definition for rural living other than the definition found in the dictionary. That statement was telling. The definition of Rural Living IS defined in the Yucaipa Municipal Code and that admission is evidence that proposed North Bench developments, such as the Serrano Estates and Casa Blanca projects, are pushing high density housing projects with little regard or consideration for the General Plan and Municipal Code.

Municipal Code Section 84.0320 establishes development standards for rural living, including standards for animal raising, setbacks and maximum housing density: ONE DWELLING UNIT PER ACRE. The one-acre gross lot size averaged over a small portion of a larger parcel is absurd and a distortion of the Municipal Code to maximize profits. Follow the logic. If you have 100 acres and only acre was developable, would a one hundred unit high rise on the one acre be allowed? The Municipal Code apparently anticipated this kind of mischief and further designated a maximum housing density standard of one dwelling unit per acre in the rural living district.

After a long night and several votes to break the 2-2 tie, the City Council eventually voted against the Serrano Estates development in a 3-1 decision. The only vote supporting the high density development came from councilman Bobby Duncan.

Noting that the few supporters of the Serrano Estates high density housing project at the planning commission and city council meetings were members of the Yucaipa Valley Wine Alliance, a number of citizens attended their meeting this last week. Several citizens again expressed their opposition stating that while they weren't opposed to vineyards, they were opposed to high density housing on the North Bench. Citizens expressed that without a guarantee in the form of a land use covenant that preserved the vineyards and open space from redevelopment, once the way was paved for high density housing, the vineyards and remaining open space would eventually be bulldozed and redeveloped into high

density housing or other developments—just as has happened in Rancho Cucamonga, Ontario, and other cities. Immediately following public comment, the developer of the 1000+-acre Casa Blanca development, moved that Kristine Mohler be removed from her position as chair of the Yucaipa Valley Wine Alliance committee. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously by the committee which included the developers and one city councilman—Bobby Duncan. Kristine, who also chairs the Trails and Open Space Committee, was the lone voice that day pushing for the 1000+ acre Casa Blanca development to conform to the Municipal Code and General Plan. How convenient to remove her from her position on the day the committee voted on new standards contrary to the Municipal Code and General Plan. The meeting then proceeded to reviewing and voting on the development standards for the Casa Blanca housing tract, almost none of which follow the standards set forth in the Municipal Code for land zoned for Rural Living. Again, the lone voice supporting adherence to the Municipal Code standards was Christine Mohler, with the remaining committee members and city councilman Bobby Duncan voting in support of high-density housing in the North Bench Rural District

In *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey learns that had he not lived, the happy town of Bedford Falls would have fallen prey to the miserly Mr. Potter and become the hopeless, depressed town of Pottersville.

What does the future hold for Yucaipa? Bedford Falls or Pottersville?

This election we have the opportunity to vote in two new city council members. **Sherilyn Long** and **Nena Drago** have both expressed they will work to uphold the existing standards for Rural Living in Yucaipa. Please help Yucaipa preserve its identity.