

Well, I attended what was my first city council meeting since moving here 1-1/2 years ago, and it was enlightening. Not having complete background on the Evergreen Visioning Project, Dave Cortese, local politics, etc. I can only give you my impressions. My focus at this meeting was on whether the task force has given appropriate consideration to school issues.

Our District 8 Councilman, Dave Cortese, who has led the Evergreen Visioning Task Force, did not mention the concerns his constituents have about the impact of new housing on our schools. Councilman Reed said he had been flooded with email about the need for more schools; the only reference Cortese made was a sarcastic remark that Mayor Gonzales had received only one email that day about schools and he gets twenty times that many each day about Coyote Valley.

The Planning Department's Laurel Prevetti, in reply to Reed's comment about schools, said the city's hands are tied because the state legislature took away options. She said the city has levied impact fees to handle school development needs but the costs go beyond what can be raised that way. She added they are looking for unique solutions, that a guiding principal of the task force is to work to address the school issue, and that it must be resolved before new housing is introduced. She stated that the school district is represented on the task force. However, there was no mention by anyone that there is a proposal to unify EESD, or of AATK.

Dave Cortese appeared on the defensive before discussion by other council members began, citing the large number of meetings and notices that have taken place. He tried to build a case for diligence and community outreach but was unsuccessful, especially after one public comment after another complained about lack of outreach. Traffic was a major concern of citizens and council members. Cortese characterized the plan as an infill project, while the planning department was prompted to point out that adding 5000+ homes is an unusually large project for the city. Councilwoman Chavez questioned the use of a non-specific plan, as did Mayor Gonzales, saying it seems disjointed.

There was a motion (which passed) offered by Councilwoman Campos and Gonzales to change from a non-specific plan to a specific plan (including a new task force with Cortese as president, Campos as vice president, and representation from District 5 staff as that council seat is vacant), and to delay approval of the task force's update for two weeks. Prior to the vote (if I understood his comments) Cortese said "when this item comes back the task force members will take it as a slap in the face," that his work is concluded, and he is not interested in chairing the next task force and would submit his final report.

I am left with questions:

- Is Cortese really against public debate about the school issues and their inclusion in this planning process?
- Does the city really have such little influence to address school capacity issues as implied by the planning department?
- Will starting with a new task force (building on work-to-date) offer more opportunity to highlight the issues of high school capacity and quality?
- Will expanding the task force to include more members from adjacent/impacted districts impact our ability to get the high school issues addressed?