

WEDNESDAY, May 29, 2013

Decision on new school put off a year

BY ANGELA RUGGIERO
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The Palo Alto school district will need a 13th elementary school due to its growing enrollment, but the school board decided last night to postpone a decision on where to put the school until next year.

The school board could have made a decision in the coming weeks that would have set in motion [See SCHOOL, page 26]

No. 1 in Palo Alto and the Mid-Peninsula

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169,000 houses in jeopardy

BY JERAMY GORDON
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More than 169,000 Bay Area houses, or one out of every nine such homes in the nine county region, would need to be demolished in order to make room for the amount of new condos and townhouses required under Plan Bay Area, according to a senior fellow from

Critic of Plan Bay Area says high-density housing threatens single-family homes

the Libertarian-leaning Cato Institute.

"Any earthquake or other natural event that resulted in this much destruction would be counted as the greatest

natural catastrophe in American history," Randal O'Toole said in a report criticizing the draft plan that was released two months ago.

"... Plan Bay Area is not only poorly planned, it is dishonest. The entire plan should be scrapped and restarted, preferably at the local level rather than the regional level," O'Toole said.

But Mark Luce, a Napa County supervisor and president of the Association of Bay Area Governments, or [See HOUSES, page 10]

Plan proposes big shift HOUSES —

ABAG, which prepared the Plan Bay Area report, told the Post that O'Toole's comments are not based in reality.

"I personally find what he said really disturbing," Luce said of O'Toole's prediction. "He has a reputation for being an objective critic. This is anything but objective."

Luce said O'Toole's estimates are not only false, but are directly contradicted by the plan.

"What our document says, I believe rather clearly, is that there will be demand for 169,000 fewer single-family units than currently exist," Luce said, "so we've reduced the amount of multifamily units by that amount as well. Those houses aren't necessarily going away."

O'Toole, however, said that the only reason demand for single-family homes will fall, is because they will be unaffordable to the average home buyer, not because people would rather live in condos or townhouses like Plan Bay Area contends.

"It's wishful thinking done by

someone who doesn't understand economics," O'Toole said of the plan's predictions. "They don't understand what the word 'demand' means. It's not something that can be represented by a single number."

Plan Bay Area claims that the planned reduction of single-family homes from 56% to just 39% of the region's housing stock reflects changes in housing preferences.

Preferences based on race

Plan Bay Area said retirement-age residents and residents without children prefer living in condos and townhouses close to mass transit. It also said ethnic groups, such as Hispanics and Asians, have a preference for multigenerational housing instead of single-family homes.

To reach these conclusions, O'Toole said ABAG relied on studies by University of Utah planner Arthur Nelson.

"His work is not credible," O'Toole said, adding that Nelson based his findings on his own "interpretation" of surveys that other planners have called "flawed."

"In other words, if it is true

that there is a growing demand for high-density housing, then one way to meet that demand would be to reduce regulation and allow builders to build for the market," O'Toole said. "Plan Bay Area instead would mandate and subsidize construction of high-density housing whether there is a market for it or not."

Portland's experience

O'Toole pointed to what he called a "failed transit-oriented development" in Portland, Ore., where he used to live, as an example.

"They built the street car and light rail and then subsidized all this housing, but people living downtown didn't take the transit, they biked or walked," O'Toole said of Portland.

Palo Alto and Menlo Park have been struggling to find undeveloped land to rezone in order to meet their ABAG housing quotas. Plan Bay Area is forcing Palo Alto to zone for 2,179 housing units over the next 10 years. Menlo Park is being required to zone for nearly another 1,500 homes.

O'Toole also said that high-den-

in housing types

sity housing in the downtown areas doesn't increase the use of public transportation, but instead has the exact opposite effect.

"As the Bay Area's population has grown, the region's transit ridership has dramatically declined," O'Toole said.

Needs of cities

Luce defended the plan and said ABAG went "above and beyond" to accommodate the needs of individual cities.

While the plan pushes cities to zone for more low-income housing, Luce said it doesn't stop cities from zoning for other types of housing as well.

"Government is free to zone all the additional housing that it wants," he said.

Luce and O'Toole will face off tomorrow night at a first-of-its-kind Plan Bay Area public forum in Marin.

Debate tomorrow

Marin County Supervisor Steve Kinsey will join Luce on the pro side and Thomas Rubin, an Oakland-based transportation consultant, will join O'Toole on the con side.

The event will be from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. tomorrow in the Board of Supervisors' chambers at the Marin Civic Center in San Rafael.

Major points of plan's critic

In advance of tomorrow night's Plan Bay Area debate, Cato Institute Senior Fellow Randal O'Toole released a damning report that calls the Association of Bay Area Government's plan a failure.

ABAG officials fired back saying the plan is a good one and that they intend to defend it vigorously.

Here are some Bay Area findings O'Toole said fly in the face of ABAG's mission:

- Residents, now and in the future, prefer living in single-family homes;
- densification and mass transit do little to ease greenhouse gases;
- public transit trips in the Bay Area declined 36% from 100 per capita in 1982 to 64 in 2011;

- the number of people commuting by car has increased 30% since 1982;
- residents using public transit to commute have fallen since 1980;
- increase in rail ridership is equal to, if not less than, the decrease in bus ridership;
- urban growth restrictions, or limits on where new housing can be built, bumped housing prices to a record 11 times the median family income;
- density in urban areas of the Bay are already nearly twice the national average;
- priority development areas, such as those near mass transit, represent only 5% of the region's land area but have been tapped to hold 77% of the new housing.