

Big picture questions about SJC Future

What value does the parcel data have?

- * it gives a snapshot of the current status of all land in sjc;
- * because there is a snapshot of parcel data from the year 2000, trends can be explored;
- * because there are thousands of grandfathered parcels smaller than the density designation in which they are located, the density map alone would give a false (smaller) reading of the total number of dwelling units that could be constructed on as yet undeveloped and unsubdivided land;

Where to begin the conversation about the ultimate size of the county?

- * is it possible, legally or otherwise, to say we are full?
- * if the answer is no, then a Vision Statement that was developed by the community which describes a slow, small, stable rural environment is irrelevant. If this is true, then we must clearly and unambiguously communicate it to all stakeholders in the county.
- * if the answer is yes, then we have to first determine what “full” means:
- * does the notion of “full” have any bearing to physical constraints such as water, waste, food production, etc. generally described under the concept of “carrying capacity” (think lifeboat)?
- * does the notion of “full” have non-measurable aesthetic, biologic (e.g., wildlife, plant and sub-soil communities) and human community qualities that are as valuable in determining “fullness” as physical or financial considerations?
- * anecdotally as well as scientifically, there is a growing percentage of the population that believes humans have exceeded various global carrying capacity boundaries, that we are consuming earth capital, not just earth interest, and that we are consequently creating a mass extinction event consistent with over consumption of the commons. The history of the rise and collapse of civilizations has demonstrated the conditions and inevitability of this repeatable pattern when human populations exceed the resource base they live on.
- * Thus, regardless of existing legal structures, which are based on human organization structures, they are subordinate to physical and biological boundaries.
- * Should the citizens and govt of SJC recognize those boundaries in creating an organizational structure within which human life in SJC can function, flourish, and thrive in reasonable perpetuity?
- * If those boundaries are the guidelines, is the current Vision Statement consistent with those boundaries? Does the Vision Statement need to be modified to conform to these boundaries?
- * Assuming that a first approximation of those boundaries is consistent with the Vision Statement, how would “full” be defined? Note that absent human communities, the san juan archipelago has operated as a thriving biological system for millions of years. “Full”, then, specifically refers to the negative impact of humans. For millennia, the archipelago has been inhabited by humans, but the negative impact of their presence has been de minimis. It is only in the past 50 years that the negative impact of humans on the archipelago has been increasing to the point of actionable concern.

- * The existing legal structure for describing and managing “fullness” is the Comprehensive Plan, specifically the density designations assigned to delineated areas of land (i.e., land parcels).
- * Approximately 40 years ago, SJC crafted a comprehensive plan in which density designations were established for parcels without consideration of the cumulative negative impact of humans. Additionally, land parcels had been created that were much smaller than the density designations within which these parcels were located. These activities were done prior to the awareness of the collective impact that humans would have should all the parcels be inhabited.
- * The citizens of SJC have the opportunity to re-evaluate whether and to what degree a previous understanding about the cumulative negative impacts of population growth inherent in a series of decisions that were made at an earlier time is in their collective best interests today and going forward.
- * Failing to comprehensively and thoughtfully explore this opportunity is to allow the limited awareness of the past to dictate the conditions of the future. To do so is contradictory to the consistent pattern of advances in medicine, technology, cultural attitudes, political, educational and financial transformations that have occurred in virtually every area of human activity in virtually every nation and culture on the planet over the past several hundreds of years.
- * Legal structures exist and do not have to be invented to re-design and re-allocate the opportunities for humans to live sustainably within the boundaries of biology and the Vision Statement. It is neither impossible nor wise to presume that our current density allocation and our current “grandfathered” properties, all of which may be inconsistent with our definition of “full”, prohibit us from making responsible and appropriate changes.

Going forward, we need to first:

- * create a process for comprehensively defining “full” unencumbered by current legal structures, attitudes and beliefs about what legally exists today.
- * Craft a pathway to transition our attitudinal and legal (personal) infrastructure to our collectively chosen new aspirational infrastructure that is fair, effective and timely.