

YOLO COUNTY 2020
Planning for a Better Future

Report of
A Conference of Yolo County Citizens

In cooperation with
University of California
Agricultural Issues Center

Yolo County 2020 Conference Steering Committee

Co-chair: Helen Thomson, Yolo County Board of Supervisors
Co-Chair: Ann Scheuring, Yolo County Planning Commission
Mike Carotenuto, Woodland, representing Chambers of Commerce
Ray Coppock, UC Davis, Agricultural Issues Center
Peter Faye, Chair, Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO);
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Mike McGowan, West Sacramento City Council
Kathy Merwin, Clarksburg Advisory Committee
Bill Pfanner, Winters City Council
Charles Rominger, Yolo County Farm Bureau; farmer, Winters
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Susan Sanders, environmental advocate
Gary Sandy, Woodland City Council
Gary Schaad, Yolo County Land Conservation Trust, Dunnigan
Al Sokolow, UC Davis, Dept. of Political Science
Lois Wolk, Davis City Council

Numerous air quality, transit and land use planning efforts are now under way in this region. The Steering Committee acknowledges the prodigious work of the professional staff, elected and appointed officials, and volunteer organizations in developing these plans.

Speakers

Opening address:

Ed Heidig, California Resources Agency:
"The Challenge of Growth"

Focus on local issues:

William Kahrl, editor of the California Water Atlas:
"Water: Key Issues for the Sacramento Valley"
Gerald A. Rominger, president, Yolo County Farm Bureau:
"Agriculture: The Land and the Economy"
Michael R. Eaton, Environmental Consultant:
"Transportation and Air Quality"
Steve Chainey, Vegetation Ecologist:
"Open Space: Needs for Habitat and Recreation"
Tina Thomas, Attorney, Remy and Thomas:
"Housing, Jobs and Economic Development"
Alvin Sokolow, Professor of Political Science, UC, Davis:
"Land Use Policy and Local Government Fiscal Health"

Luncheon speaker:

Ben Williams, Governor's Office of Planning and Research:
"Growth Management Initiatives and Issues"

Maps used during the 2020 Conference were donated by Don Reiners and Tom Lumbrazo.
Volunteer small group leaders were members of the Sacramento Valley section of the American Planning Association.
Davis and Woodland Leagues of Women Voters provided recorders for the general session and small groups

Introduction

On May 4, 1991, more than 200 citizens and community leaders spent the day together at the County Administration Building in Woodland to consider the future of Yolo County.

Participants in the conference, titled "Yolo County 2020: Planning for a Better Future," were challenged with these words:

Yolo County is fortunate to possess rich natural resources, great agricultural productivity, thriving small cities and a major university campus, all within an expanding regional economy. Exploding regional population growth, however, may now threaten Yolo County's future... "Yolo County 2020" hopes to inspire the creativity

and determined leadership that citizens need to meet the challenges of growth while preserving the best of their heritage.

Seven hours of a wide-ranging conference included presentations by selected speakers, a discussion period focused on several major planning issues, and a mapping exercise in which small groups sought areas of agreement on future land uses within the county.

This report highlights the agreements, disagreements and conclusions of the conference—especially of the ten discussion groups, each diverse in viewpoint, that worked to resolve concerns about Yolo County's future.



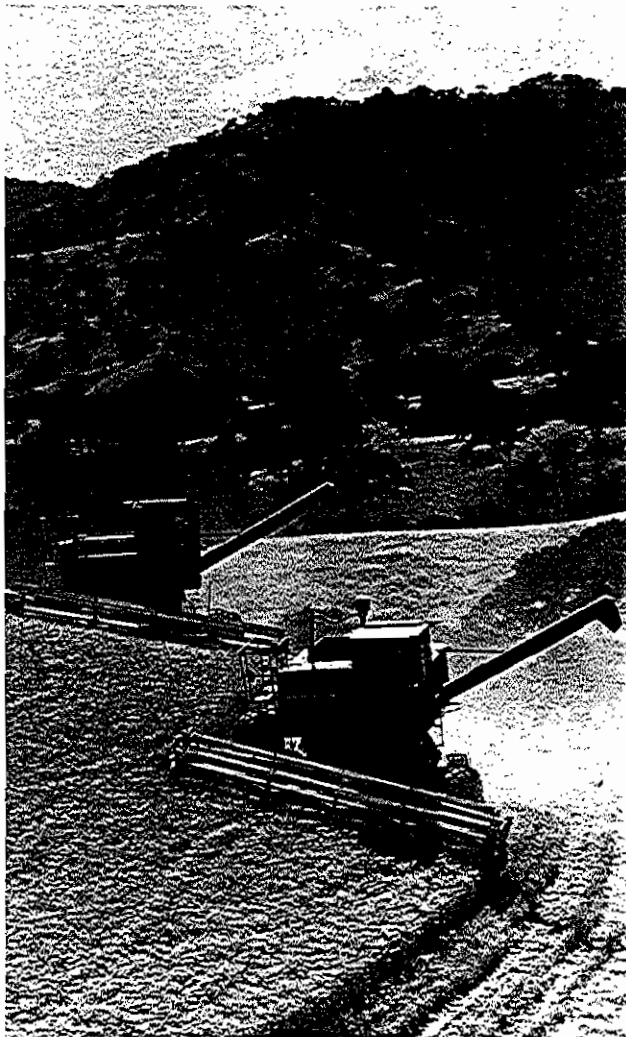
The words spoken at the conference have been edited and summarized to fit here. The ideas have not. Each of the central points in the following text was voiced again and again during the conference.

These major issues were aired by speakers during the discussion groups, and reviewed by reporters presenting each group's conclusions to the final plenary session. Because so many were involved, names of individuals are not cited here. However, selected statements (printed in italic) suggest some of the flavor of the discussions.

For one day, attendees at the Yolo 2020 Conference focused on options for protecting Yolo County's future. Despite differing viewpoints in many areas, they found many areas of agreement. Their ideas, concerns and recommendations deserve thoughtful attention.

The County Today

In some ways, Yolo County is unique. Historically a productive and prosperous agricultural



We enjoy a fine lifestyle. We hope to continue to work together to pass that quality of life on to our children and grandchildren as this state absorbs the growth that is coming.

area, it retains its farmland ambience even in the shadow of the State Capitol. It also has a large, respected university in a small-town, rural setting.

In other ways, Yolo County is not unique. The county government is in grave financial straits. Farm receipts are down while housing costs are up. Urban growth is rapid and seemingly inescapable.

It is important to keep in mind that Yolo County is part of a larger region. Its sand and gravel resources are needed in neighboring counties, it is in the same air basin as the cities of Sacramento and Vacaville, and it is squeezed by development pressures from both ends of the I-80 corridor. Yolo County shares the opportunities and challenges of inevitable growth with the entire region.

Despite these concerns and pressures, Yolo County has many advantages in planning for its future. Some other agricultural areas in California have become urbanized with little forethought, with careless development resulting in sprawl, loss of farmlands, and finally destruction of a viable agricultural economy. So far, Yolo County has done an exemplary job of preserving its farmland base, even when doing so has hurt financially. In general, Yolo County citizens have long been and still are progressive and community-minded. They share a unique relationship with an outstanding campus of the University of California. It is not too late to reaffirm the county's traditional support of agriculture, and to carefully manage and direct growth in foresighted ways.

The greatest growth in the Sacramento region will be nearest the foothills, especially Placer and El Dorado counties. Yolo County thinks it is suffering from growing pains, but actually it will have the slowest growth rate in the region.

Choices and Uncertainties

The Yolo 2020 Conference dealt with questions about certain problem areas of the county's present and future: (1) agriculture,

(2) water, (3) housing, jobs and economic development, (4) transportation and air quality, (5) open space and recreation and (6) impacts of land use policies on government finances. Since virtually all the discussions touched on urban development policy, in this report it is presented as an additional topic.

Here are a few examples of the questions given to the discussion groups:

- Can agriculture co-exist with industrial or commercial development?
- What kinds of new housing should be encouraged?
- Could "new towns" or "satellite communities" be workable options?

- How can the cities and the county avoid competition for tax dollars from industrial or commercial development?

- What additional land use planning policies or tools might be needed?
- How can agriculture's need for water be balanced with urban and other water demands?
- What environmentally sensitive areas in Yolo County deserve protection?
- Is there such a thing as "critical mass" for agriculture in Yolo County?

These questions and others appear in one form or another in this report. Some of them seem to have been answered here; some do not. None of them will go away.

The Issues: Resources, Tradeoffs

Agriculture: The Land Resource

The overriding concern in considering Yolo County's future is agricultural land preservation, particularly of prime soils. Twenty or thirty years is almost too short a time frame when considering this central issue.

On the other hand, should this generation make long-term commitments on agricultural land use? Is it fair to make these decisions for our children?

Central Valley farmland is unique; this is the only vast, flat, fertile, Mediterranean-type farming region remaining in the world. Yolo County, along with several San Joaquin Valley counties, is a leader

in the Central Valley's farm production. Growth pressures in the San Joaquin Valley may actually increase the need for farmland here. Furthermore, agriculture has its own unique value to Yolo County urban residents as open space.

California farmers cannot retreat over the next mountain range and produce \$17 billion worth of food and fiber in Nevada.



Obviously, we don't want to pave over Yolo

County, but we must keep in mind the need for a balance between resource preservation and population growth. As proponents of farmland preservation, what level of population and urban development would we be comfortable with? We must establish priorities for accommodating growth. In making these decisions, soil quality should be an important criterion because Yolo County has some of the world's finest soil.

To maintain agriculture as the primary industry in Yolo County,

municipal and industrial development should be restricted to transportation corridors and to poorer soils. We also need to preserve as much as possible of our rangeland as well as non-prime soils that grow important crops such as almonds, rice and grapes. These crops make significant contributions, both economically and environmentally. Rice, for example, helps to support and preserve managed multi-purpose wetlands.

Land, labor, water, capital, transportation networks, processing facilities, access to markets and a fair return to producers—each is an important link in the agricultural chain.

On the other hand, how much land is really needed for agricultural production? Acreage of subsidized crops probably will be reduced; rice likely would be gone without subsidies. Also, agriculture uses most of our limited water supply. And maybe there should be room for ranchettes to provide a country lifestyle without commercial farm production.

Williamson Act

Unincorporated lands in Yolo County total about 600,000 acres. Of that, about 287,000 acres are prime farmland. (See map on page 5.) Currently, about 73 percent of the county's farmland is enrolled in the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) Program, totalling 493,000 acres.

So far, the Williamson Act has worked well here; however, we should strengthen it and add incentives because there is increasing pressure to take land out of the program in anticipation of development. About 7 percent of existing Williamson Act contracts are now in the 10-year cancellation process.

Inevitably some farmers will want to sell their land. We must plan for that. There is a real possibility of clashes between farmers and environmentalists over land use.

Farmland Preservation Policy Options

If the county is to preserve viable farmland, we need to make it clear to everybody, including the state of California, that agriculture is important to Yolo County. Possibly people might even be willing to pay certain kinds of taxes to keep agricultural land from being developed. (Citizens in Sonoma County recently voted an increase in sales tax for public purchase of development rights and open space.)

Purchase development rights on existing ag lands. Have developers pay for those rights so we can maintain the open space that differentiates Yolo County from Sacramento or Los Angeles.

Despite the temptation to farmers of high land prices from would-be developers, dollars don't drive everything. Public policy tools can make a difference.

Just as Yolo County agriculture needs land, water, and climate, it needs certain governmental tools to survive. These include:

- A strong county general plan, with an agricultural element.
- A right-to-farm ordinance.
- A purchase-of-development-rights ordinance.
- Continued state financial support of the Williamson Act.
- An ordinance restricting the export of water.
- A strong LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) policy on city annexation of prime farmland.

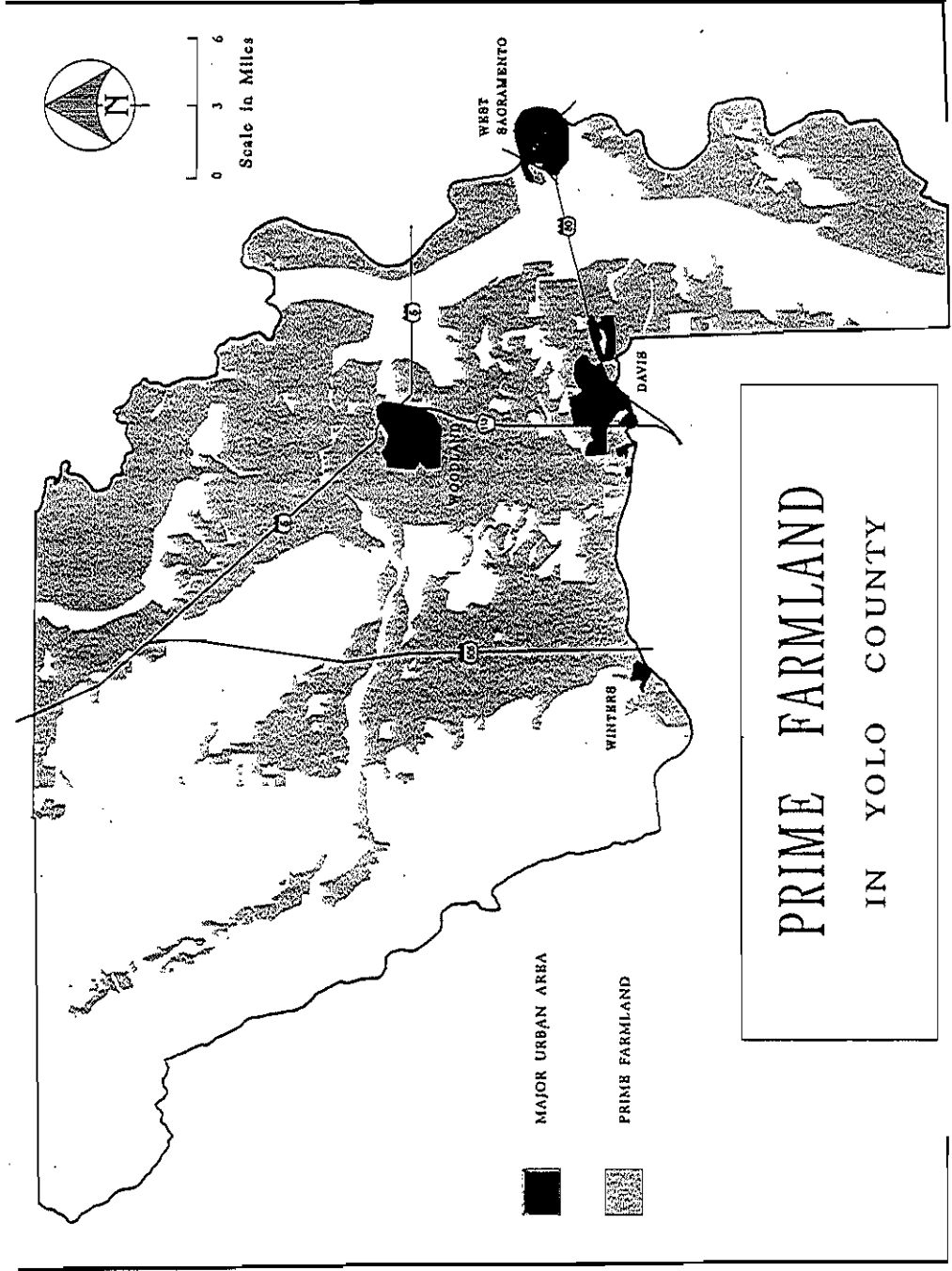
The underlying need, on which all these depend, is an informed electorate that understands and appreciates the contribution of agriculture to the quality of life in Yolo County.

Keep compromise in mind; you're in a better position to say "no" to growth in one direction if you allow for growth in another.

Buffer zones between intensive agriculture and residential areas will be useful because of the use of pesticides and farm equipment on the one hand, and potential trespass and vandalism on the other. Where they are neighbors, both farmers and city residents will have to adjust their expectations and practices.

Also, the mix of agriculture may well have to change to fit economic conditions. Important factors will include availability of irrigation water and processing capacity.

Yolo County communities need to interact to make informed decisions about development in the county. Some attempts already are under way; they should be encouraged. The county's future depends



**PRIME FARMLAND
IN YOLO COUNTY**

"Prime" farmland, Yolo County's outstanding natural resource, is composed of soils that are flat, well drained and capable of producing good yields of many kinds of crops.

Other soils in Yolo County, those that are hilly or less well drained, produce a spectrum of important crops from wine grapes to dryland barley. Thus, non-prime farmlands contribute significantly to the county's agricultural economy and to its environment. However, prime soils are more versatile, easier to manage, and usually more productive.

The state's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program defines prime farmland as "Land with the best combination of physical and chemical features for the production of agricultural crops."

This map, adapted from the Important Farmland Series map published by the state Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, was produced by Paul Hansen, City of Woodland Planning Department.

to a large extent on how much consensus we can achieve on these issues.

Ag-industrial Development

Since Yolo County needs to balance growth and agriculture, one option is to encourage farm-related industries such as processing plants and dehydrators. Bringing such enterprises, and the jobs they provide, to the county would reduce both commuter mileage to work and also distances of transportation for farm commodities. Ideally, these industries should be located on non-prime land, although that might increase hauling distances somewhat.

An agricultural industrial park would provide space for food packaging plants and similar industries near highways and other means of transportation. Another argument for such a rural agricultural enterprise zone is that some resource-based industries don't mix well with housing—for example, the biomass plant in Woodland or Hunt-Wesson Foods' plant in Davis. The first clearly should have been located farther out; the second was initially located in an adjacent rural area.

We should be wary of encouraging much development where transportation happens to be cheap and easy, but where water and housing may be scarce. Example: the Dunnigan area.

The county's current policy on growth includes protection for agriculture. In that sense, it's a good land-use policy; but it doesn't encourage county revenue from industrial or commercial growth in unincorporated areas, either.

Water

Yolo County's water supply, like its farmland, is threatened by more people and more urban development. Water for city growth probably will have to come from agriculture. Yet, if agriculture is to maintain its economic and environmental role in Yolo County's future, irrigation water for crops must be available. This means that water almost certainly will—and should be—a limiting factor in growth. (Most urban areas use

about the same amount of water per acre as agriculture, however, both urban density and irrigation methods make a difference in efficiency of use.)

Cities will have to explore alternatives and carefully manage their water supplies. Yolo County needs a coordinated, countywide, long-term water planning effort involving both agricultural and municipal needs.

The most important water sources for Yolo County and its cities are the Sacramento River, Cache Creek (Clear Lake and Indian Valley), Putah Creek, and ground water. Besides conservation, potential sources of increased supply are the Tehama-Colusa Canal, possible increased storage along Cache Creek (not Clear Lake), and underground storage. For the future, efficient water management will require coordinated (conjunctive) use of surface and ground water.

Conservation

While farmers at present use an estimated 80 percent of the county's water, they are not necessarily wasting it. Most of what they use is needed for crop growth, and most of the remainder returns to the system through percolation and surface runoff. However, farmers undoubtedly could achieve some water savings with irrigation management and technology. Meanwhile, urban society has a water-using mindset. In the future, we may have to ask if our lawns are justifiable in a Mediterranean, semi-desert climate. Drought-tolerant landscaping may have to be required in all new developments throughout Yolo County



Technology to reduce household water use (low-flow toilets and shower heads, etc.) might be further developed and required throughout the county. For example, the City of Davis will require water meters in older homes (retrofit) when 80 percent of all new housing has them.

Water Sales

This year (1991), farmland in Yolo County is lying fallow not only because of the water shortage but because part of the supply is being sold. What is the negative impact of these transfers on agriculture? Does it imply that too much land is being farmed in the county? If we continue to export water, will county agriculture be permanently changed?

Water transfers impose an additional prospect of hostility between cities and farmland water users because of the potential of overdrafting the aquifers.

We also need to know more about secondary impacts of water sales which, while providing immediate economic benefits to the farmers who sell water, could have negative economic and environmental impacts on the county. In any case, state government should have strong policies to control sales of local water supplies, particularly ground water.

Yolo County's water future depends partly on statewide or regional decisions—for example, the proposed peripheral canal. In particular, Yolo County needs to participate in a regional groundwater management plan. Groundwater storage and recharge as a conjunctive practice with gravel mining is possible along Cache Creek. It is being studied as part of the environmental impact report on gravel mining.

An important question for Yolo County is the proposed Auburn Dam. Its effect on the Sacramento flood plain has important implications for Yolo County due to the structure and condition of our levees.

Meanwhile, some rural land subsidence as a result of groundwater pumping is taking place in Yolo County. More study of this phenomenon is needed.

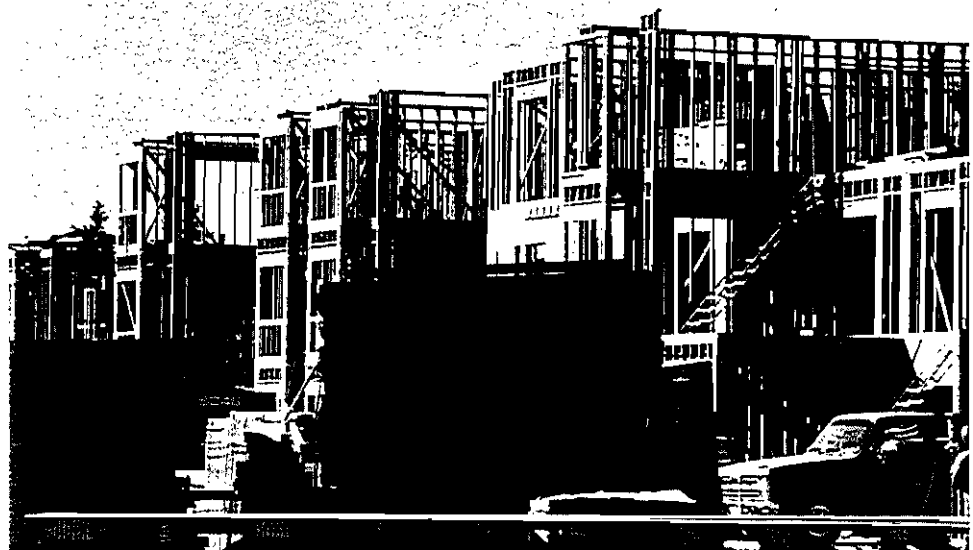
Housing, Jobs and Economic Development

Bedroom communities are already here in Yolo County, and they are going to get bigger. But is that kind of growth desirable?

Question: Should we plan housing for people who work in Sacramento? They can afford a moderately-priced single home on a nice lot; after those are built, we could worry about apartments and low-cost housing.

Response: No, we don't want to grow only on Sacramento's economy, although some of that is inevitable. Yolo County needs to address the problem of jobs for people who live here. That can be done only with a local economy that provides local jobs.

Also, in the long run, a jobs/housing balance to reduce commuting would be the best solution to the regional air quality problem.



However, even with a balance of jobs and housing, people will still commute, for example: from Davis to Sacramento and from elsewhere in the region to Davis. (Eventually, the trend to "telecommuting" may help.) Access to public transportation is crucial!

Meanwhile, the economic power is in the cities. The question is how to prime the economic pump in the county. A city-county coordinated plan to bring in and locate industry, and to create a better jobs/housing balance, is badly needed.

Perceptions:

Davis—A town that believes its destiny is to plan for the rest of Yolo County.

Woodland—As the county seat, thinks it is at the center of the universe.

Housing Needs and Prices

If we work to attract ag-related industries to Yolo County, and if we maintain a jobs/housing balance, affordable housing will have to be provided for people who work in those industries. In any case, the current housing shortage in Yolo County is felt by buyers at all income levels. Home prices are not only high in Davis, but are rapidly rising in Woodland and Winters. In particular, there is a serious lack of housing for first-time buyers.

This is partly because neighborhoods resist affordable housing projects. To help solve this problem, low income housing should not be all apartments; single family units are needed. One way to encourage more affordable housing is increased density, which also helps save farmland. Small units, granny flats, cluster housing, co-housing and alternative housing—any and all innovative efforts to provide housing should be encouraged.

Perceptions:

West Sacramento—Can't make up its mind whether it is part of Yolo County or Sacramento County.

Winters—A village of farmers, farm workers and airline pilots.

Nevertheless, real estate interests ask: Can smaller lots be marketed? Families may be getting smaller, but large lots are increasing in demand. At the other extreme, ranchettes create "rurban" sprawl, eating into farmland and stretching the ability to provide public services. If permitted at all, large lot developments should take place only on non-prime land.

UC Davis is a countywide resource, and provides employment for many county residents. However, it is not currently meeting the housing needs of its students, much less its faculty and staff. The University should recognize that it creates a

need for housing and should share housing responsibilities with the larger community. In particular, the University should be responsible for providing affordable housing.

The University is a major resource throughout the county. All communities should cooperate in helping this asset to meet its housing needs.

Urban Development Policy

The realities are that California is projected to grow even more in the next decade, the Sacramento area is one of the six most rapidly growing regions in the entire United States, and Yolo County is a very desirable place to live. We will have to accept more people and more economic development. We can, however, set standards for how we grow.

The idea that only money makes decisions is cynical and fatalistic; with planning and commitment, we can manage growth. We should not be willing to just sit back and let things happen to us.

While many residents of Yolo County probably would like to stop growth entirely, it's

Our group would like to limit growth to the foothill areas; that is, the Sierra foothills.

crucial to focus plans on the realities of an expanding population and economy. Our choice is phased or slow growth versus rapid and uncontrolled growth.

Parts of the county inevitably will be under pressure to become residential communities for Sacramento-based workers. We should acknowledge that pressure and deal with it. If we don't meet our share of regional housing needs, there will be fiscal consequences to the cities and the county.

The Planning Process

Formal planning to limit growth often runs into certain barriers:

- Political interest group conflicts, including arguments for letting people live where they want versus protection for the status quo.

• Potentially adverse economic effects, including high housing prices and erosion of the tax base.

These political and economic dilemmas can stymie efforts to plan. Thus, many growth decisions can be made by default. However, there seems to be a growing willingness on the part of developers in Yolo County to respond to the issues of growth and land use raised by concerned citizens,

We cannot tell people that they cannot live in Yolo County, but we must tell them where they can and where they cannot build their houses. Otherwise, agriculture is doomed.

as long as expectations and concerns are clearly voiced.

We need to spend more effort, and more money, on intelligent land-use planning. The current budget crisis, in part a legacy of Proposition 13, keeps the county from funding some key planning positions. Why not fund the county-wide planning agency with parking charges? Or consider using a portion of a countywide sales tax for such purposes? Citizens should get behind efforts to support a strong but flexible county planning capability.

Strategies: Density, Satellites, New Towns

Should cities have an upper limit for growth? What size is most efficient for community satisfaction? These questions are debatable. In any case increased municipal density has three important benefits: it encourages more affordable housing, it uses up less agricultural land, and it simplifies transportation planning.

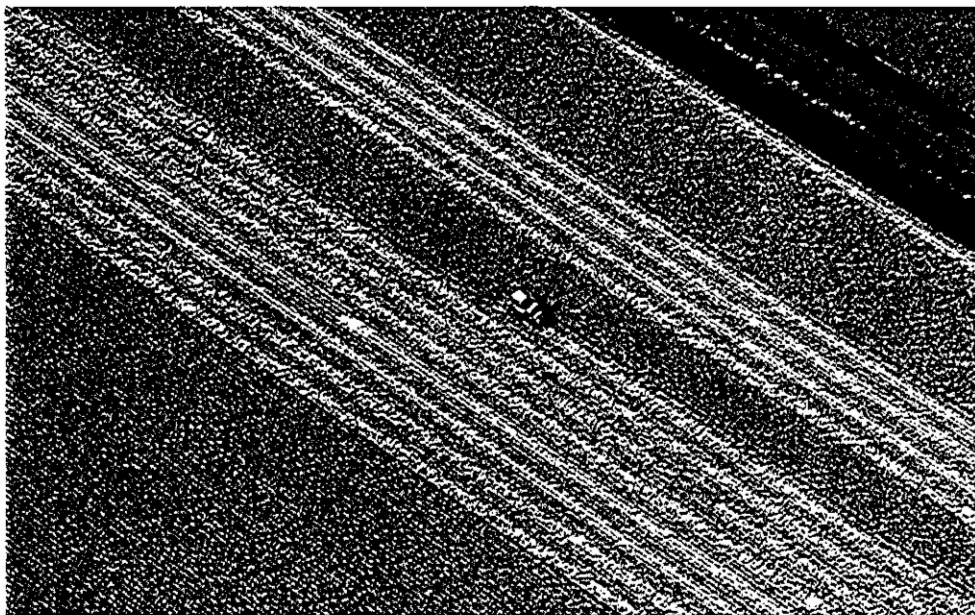
Growth possibilities are restricted in some of Yolo County's older communities, and we may need

Good land use means going up and not spreading out.

Existing cities undoubtedly will expand through annexation, but prime goals should be in-fill development and orientation to public transit systems.

to create some new towns. On the other hand, increasing the size of present cities, with their existing infrastructures, would come closer to meeting the needs of lower-income people. But should residential growth be encouraged in small towns that even now don't have enough tax base for schools and libraries?

Higher densities within existing communities are clearly a win-win situation: less transportation, less pollution, less cost. But, politically, are people willing to accept large amounts of additional



multiple-story housing? Many won't agree to apartment-style living.

In any case, general plans should require realistic density within cities as one way to preserve more open space and to encourage the development of transit systems.

Would satellite towns be just bedrooms, or real communities? There is need for community identity and a real economic base.

Also, would "new towns" be compatible with farming? Satellite cities could be located on marginal soil, or at the least on non-prime land. But how would infrastructure be provided? Water, for example: non-irrigated land won't have a ready-made supply, as prime farmland does.

How about a separate community sponsored by an existing city? ("Sponsored" in the sense

of providing services and infrastructure.) Such a community would have its own identity, not be just another suburb. It could become an independent city upon growing large enough to support itself—say, at about 20,000 population.

In Europe, houses are built in the hills, leaving the valley for agriculture. Because of Yolo County's geography, such a policy could increase commute problems and air pollution.

Transportation and Air Quality

Both travel time and air quality are at stake in Yolo County transportation planning.

Although interstate highways are major movers of cars and trucks, federal money to build and maintain them has been decreasing. Meanwhile, county roads have not been maintained very well. And although everybody talks about mass transit, it may require greater population density than now exists in most of the county.

In any case, development in Yolo County should be concentrated not only away from prime farmland, but near transportation corridors. For example, north-south Interstate 5 should influence the location of agriculturally-related industry.

Yolo County cities and the UC Davis campus need to pay more attention to regional transportation planning efforts. The new mandated congestion management plan may help. Recent initiatives (Propositions 108 and 116) and the Hannigan rail legislation have put within reach the possibility of vastly improved passenger rail service between Sacramento, Davis, and the Bay Area.

An inter-city train from Auburn to San Jose, with a stop in Davis, will be a reality by the mid 1990s.

Meanwhile, flexibility on the part of employers and employees is needed. More car pooling, staggered work schedules, and subsidies for use of mass transit are some options.

Economics can control commuter behavior. Possible disincentives to use of cars would be to



raise the price of gasoline and/or parking. However, individuals and communities change slowly, and transportation planning must allow for that. Obviously, one planning goal should be to provide both housing and services as close as possible to major workplaces. Studies show that 80 percent of average travel time is doing errands.

We need to encourage developers to build communities where you can walk to the stores... We should charge more for parking.

Air Quality

In Yolo County, the effect of better smog controls on cars in recent years has been offset by more drivers and more miles driven per car. Meanwhile, we have no control over growth trends in the Sacramento area or Solano County, yet we're in the same air basin. Potentially, that air basin could be as polluted as any in California.

Good land use planning can make a major contribution to both transportation efficiency and improved air quality. In fact, the transportation component of an effective county plan would be the best way to improve air quality. If we don't develop such a plan ourselves, it may be imposed on us; tighter federal and state laws are in place.

Although Yolo County does not experience the more severe air pollution violations typical of downwind areas to the east of Sacramento, such as Folsom, Roseville and Citrus Heights, Yolo County shares the regional problem and will be required by state and federal law to participate in finding solutions.

Mass Transit

Mass transit can only succeed where there is high population density. Can we or do we want to provide such high densities in Yolo County?

How feasible is mass transit? In parts of the Bay Area people aren't using it, but in Sacramento light rail usage is exceeding the projections. The crucial question for Yolo County is population density.

Because light rail makes it easier to work where you don't live, it tends to encourage bedroom communities and higher densities. For that reason, there will be opposition to extending light rail into Yolo County. However, by integrating transportation concerns early into land use planning, we can enable development of mass transit, such as light rail, to encourage desirable growth patterns. Don't stop the rail where growth is not wanted; extend it to the next planned growth point.

The Sacramento Regional Transit District's system study concludes that light rail extension to West Sacramento and Davis is technically feasible but at this time higher densities are a must to make it economically realistic.

It is crucial to save existing right of way easements, or they won't be there in the future when they will be needed. For example, there should be plans to use the Southern Pacific track or I-80 rights of way for light rail.

Open Space

Yolo county needs to decide now what is to be preserved as open space. We can save both wildlife habitats and farmlands if we plan ahead. We

have an opportunity to learn the lesson of Los Angeles; let's not talk about acceptable loss of open space, but rather ask how we can increase it.

Large open spaces of farmland as well as riparian areas, wetlands and wildlands are a key component in Yolo County's identity. It's important to preserve agricultural-zone buffers around our growing cities, as well as farmland farther out. Green belts and bike lanes through cities also add to the sense of open space.

Other county and city goals should include an expanded regional park system (not a substitute for local community parks); delineated floodways; bikeways and trails (planned in cooperation with landowners); protection of riparian strips along creeks; and development or renewal of wetlands in the Yolo Bypass.

Ordinances for both wildlife and farmland protection should identify and preserve open space.

How much would regional parks be used? Cache Creek Canyon Park is used a lot.

In regard to open space, the northern part of the county is untapped. Buckeye Creek offers a lot of opportunity, but it's a far distance north.

To begin with, open space in the county should be defined according to certain categories:

- Visual open space: farmland, rangeland and watershed, open water.
- Urban open space: parks, greenbelts.
- Rural open space with access: regional parks, bikeways and trails.
- Natural areas: wildlife habitat, with no access or only limited access (nature trails).

Financing to protect open space is critical. Who will pay: cities, developers, farmers, individual citizens? One possibility is "mitigation fees" from developers. Another is cooperative working relations with other public and private conservation agencies and groups. State and federal grants and bond monies are also possibilities.

Large blocks of land along transportation corridors are locked up by developers. In these areas, wildlife habitat or other open space should be designated early as appropriate for conservation easements, freeing up the least sensitive areas for other uses. Compromise is important; each interest group should designate its highest priority.

Among developers in Yolo County, there appears to be a trend toward more sensitivity about the need to preserve open space and wetlands.

Sensitive Locations

The county has a number of potential wildlife habitats, wetlands and/or recreational areas, many of them along waterways: Cache Creek, Willow Slough, Putah Creek, the Sacramento River, the Yolo Bypass, the West Sacramento deep-water channel.

Farms can provide wildlife habitat in old trees and along creeks, but it is unmanaged.

Many of these areas are currently threatened. Cache Creek needs protection as well as considerable restoration. Gravel mining operations complicate the situation there. Putah Creek will be difficult to manage but a new agreement with Solano County for additional water will help. Willow Slough is in a critical location as a natural barrier between Davis and Woodland.

Public access to open space is a problem. Farmers and other landowners are concerned about the use of off-road vehicles and guns. Even nearby bike trails may lead to litter and vandalism of private property. Public education for open space protection is sorely needed.

What kinds of recreational facilities ought to be allowed or encouraged in agricultural zones? Farmers need to take part in the planning for them.

Recreational Facilities

Yolo County currently has relatively few public recreational facilities. Regional parks would allow people to personally experience locally significant environmental areas. Existing regional parks should be master planned and expanded. Additional facilities should be located in areas where there are none at present and/or in areas with significant environmental features. These will reduce problems of trespassing on farm and range lands.

How large should regional parks be? One suggestion: About 80 acres. They should be located where access already exists, and should be connected with bikeways. Parks should include or be near water, particularly natural waterways, although that may conflict with wildlife habitat. A manmade

waterway could be important and attractive, especially if it replaces a degraded natural one.

Land Use Policy and Government Finances

Fiscal considerations are the main force that drives land use decisions in most California communities today. The process, called "zoning for dollars," involves intense competition among local governments for a tax revenue base. County governments generally are losers. Yolo County certainly is!

Desperately short of revenue, Yolo County is under pressure to approve development for fiscal reasons—to capture tax revenues not otherwise generated. Among other things, this process can short-circuit good land use planning.

Why screw up agricultural lands and the aesthetics of a region because of an illogical tax structure?

This is demonstrated by patterns of local government tax revenue in Yolo County. As the chart on page 13 shows:

- Per capita sales tax income to the county government is less than one sixth of the average amount per person collected by Davis, Woodland, Winters, and West Sacramento.

- The county collects barely a tenth of the amount per person that the cities receive from other local tax sources: business taxes, utility taxes, etc.

Per capita property tax revenue to the county, however, is comparable to the amount collected by cities.

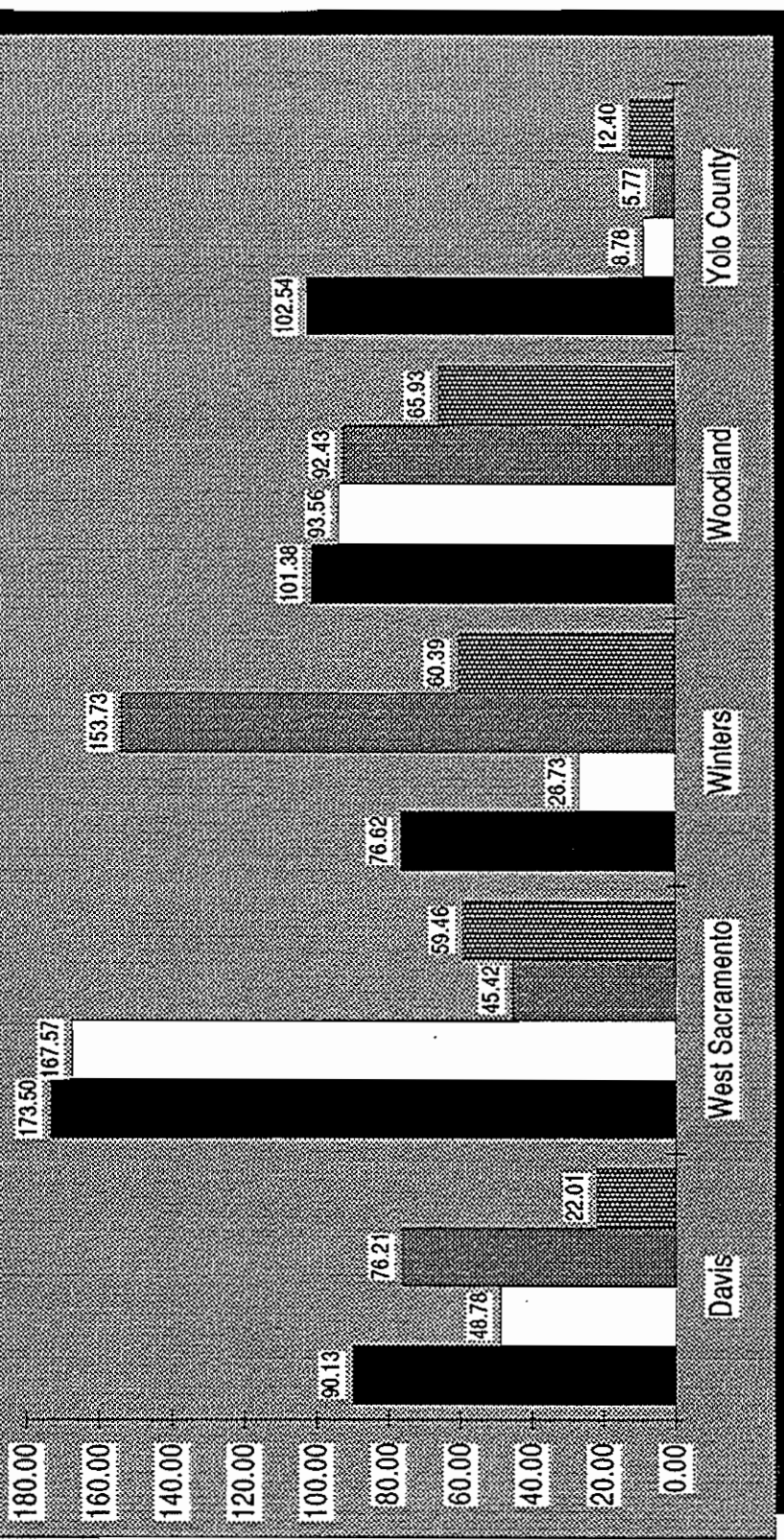
More Cooperation Needed

Cities in Yolo County should recognize regional needs and regional services within the county; there must be more sharing of revenues and resources. Currently, cities are no closer to agreements regarding revenue sharing with Yolo County than they were three years ago.

This county government will be very reluctant to approve any more expansion of city limits until a better revenue-sharing policy is in effect. The county has to provide services for all those new city residents, and receives little revenue with which to do it.

Per Capita Revenue Sources, City and County Governments, 1988-89

Property Tax
 Sales Tax
 Other Local Taxes
 Interest Income



This chart is from "Yolo County Facebook," a collection of statistical information compiled by the UC Agricultural Issues Center for the Yolo 2020 Conference. Copies of the Facebook are available from the Center, on the UC Davis campus, and from the office of Supervisor Helen Thomson (916) 666-8622.

Can Yolo County escape from its fiscal problems by allowing or encouraging development in rural areas? It would be difficult to do so under present circumstances. Additional rural residential housing costs the county more than the revenue it brings in. Meanwhile, most industries want to locate within incorporated areas because infrastructure already is in place.

Perhaps the county can have a little piece of commercial— on I-5, maybe.

Unfortunately, the rules that allocate local government revenues are all state-imposed, although they can be changed locally by cooperative agreements.

For Yolo County, the best hope besides more enlightened state policies would seem to be carefully planned development of agricultural industries in unincorporated areas, as well as more revenue-sharing by cities in line with the benefits they receive from the county. Future annexations and incorporations should include some way of reimbursing the county for lost property tax, sales tax and other revenue.

Future Land Use: Some Options

Participants in the 2020 Conference were given a challenging task: To develop consensus on land-use patterns they would like to see in Yolo County 20 to 30 years from now, and to indicate their preferences on a map. They were asked to assume that the county will have about 230,000 residents at that time, an increase of 90,000. These figures are based on the existing adopted general plans of the cities in Yolo County.

The prospect of that many additional Yolo County residents (some groups predicted even more) raises a question: How much of that growth will simply be commuter overflow from Sacramento and the Bay Area? How much will be really integrated into Yolo County's economy? The answer will indicate Yolo County's ability to maintain its own identity.

Water and prime ag land are major policy concerns for Yolo County; we must make sure they are preserved.

We've got to retain the agriculture buffer between Woodland and Davis to keep the identities of the cities separate.

We made our choices basically on the soils, and not on who owns the land or how much it would cost.

Prime Yolo County farmland is most threatened near the cities, West Sacramento, Davis, Woodland, Winters. To deal with this threat, there are three possible approaches to city growth: (1) more population density within existing city boundaries (develop vacant areas, build higher), (2) expansion onto adjacent non-prime land where it's available, and (3) new towns in outlying non-prime areas.

To accommodate 90,000 more people in Yolo County, its cities would probably have to grow about 30 to 40 percent. The largest increase in actual numbers is likely to be in West Sacramento, but all Yolo County cities would need to increase their population density.

Is it geographically possible for Yolo County cities to expand their boundaries onto non-prime land? Not in all directions, but in several areas the answer is yes. Lower-quality soils are located east and southeast of Woodland, northeast of Davis, and north and west of Winters.

The Farmland-City Growth Tradeoff

In deciding on preferred land uses, most of the small groups made one of their chief considerations the location of prime farmlands.

That heavy alkaline soil out east of Woodland is a prime candidate for city expansion.

Existing cities should expand into areas already designated in their general plans, with the understanding that densities would increase as needed to include the new population within those limits.

Even the UCD campus could densify somewhat, although there is a responsibility to think regionally about University-related housing.

Growth in the West Sacramento area should be contained within the existing city limits; there is a lot of undeveloped area.

Where might new towns be located, considering the need to protect prime farmland, but also the need to create as many local jobs as possible, to shorten commutes, and to provide water? Some possibilities, none of which are ideal:

- Near the intersection of Highways I-5 and 505 (Dunnigan).
- The Monument Hills area west of Woodland.
- East of Woodland (the Conaway Ranch).

Population growth sufficient to create a new town also undoubtedly would result in expansion of smaller existing towns such as Esparto, Madison and Knights Landing.



Mass Transit Links

Light rail is the most promising way to reduce the traffic congestion and air pollution that almost certainly will accompany growth.

The most obvious location for a future rail line is a loop on the eastern side of the county—Sacramento and West Sacramento to Davis, north to Woodland, and back to Sacramento via Metro Airport. Another possibility is a rail link, on existing right-of-way and track, between West Sacramento and Woodland. Branch rail lines, or other forms of public transit, could serve Winters and any new developments (Dunnigan area, for example). In the near future, financial and other constraints pose serious problems for light rail planning in Yolo

You could bike from Rumsey into Woodland, south to Davis and over the causeway to West Sacramento; and then down to the Clarksburg area or perhaps Merritt Island. Or you could go from Woodland across to Elkhorn and along the river.

County; but van and car pools, increased Yolo Bus service and other improvements in transportation can be realistically accomplished in the short term.

Natural Areas and Parks

Whether for wildlife habitat, visual open space or for recreation, Yolo County has an array of natural or near-natural locations that deserve protection. Whether they can all be protected is another question. They include the mountain ridges bordering the county to the west; the water courses of Cache Creek, Willow Slough and Putah Creek; the flood plain of the Yolo Bypass; and the riparian border of the Sacramento River.

Some proposals made by the small groups:

- A parkway along the Sacramento River, possibly a cooperative effort of Yolo County, Woodland, and

West Sacramento. Yolo County is already involved

in planning for this with Sacramento and Sacramento County.

- A series of regional parks linked by bikeways.

- A ridgeline regional park overlooking Lake Berryessa. A Bureau of Land Management access route already exists on top of the ridge in various locations along the way to Clear Lake.

Key Areas of Agreement

While each of the ten groups participating in "Yolo County 2020" created somewhat different maps for the future, there was clear agreement on these points:

- The county should continue strong efforts to preserve agriculture as a viable industry and to protect prime farmland resources.

- Cities should develop compactly and pursue a policy of high- and medium- density, rather than low-density development.

- The cities of Woodland and Davis should continue to have an agricultural land buffer between them.

- While West Sacramento, Davis, and Woodland should absorb most of the new population growth, smaller population increases would also be appropriate for Winters, Esparto-Madison, Dunnigan, Knights Landing and possibly the Monument Hills area.

- Planning for regional parks to include environmental habitat protection and public recreational facilities should have higher priority. Planning efforts should focus on the county's wetland areas and the western mountain ridges.

- Efforts are needed both locally and at the state level to avoid fiscalization of land use, the tendency to fund local government budgets through development.

Uncertainties in the Planning Process

Conference participants recognized that many uncertainties cast a shadow over planning efforts within Yolo County. Some believed that

money will ultimately be the deciding factor in major land use decisions; others felt that pro-active planning by both public agencies and private groups could offer protection against such temptations.

Most agreed that the state should take on a larger role in growth management, in particular the effort to protect important farmland and natural habitats. Until the State of California pursues a clear, resource-based land use policy, it will be difficult for local jurisdictions to hold the line on undesirable growth.

Meanwhile, uncertainties in the state's economy, increasing rates of population growth, and geographical shifts of industries and businesses will continue to make projections for Yolo County contingent on actual events.

Needs for Action

The two hundred citizens gathered in Woodland on May 4, 1991, did not make actual, concrete recommendations for action. Their enthusiasm for the conference and their evaluations of the day's activities, however, suggested strongly that they favor a pro-active planning approach involving all interests and all municipalities along with the county.

Such an approach requires stronger and more reliable funding for planning activities.

It also requires commitment of county and city officials, public agencies, and individual citizens to protect the public interest as resource conservation and development issues are decided for Yolo County from now until 2020 and beyond.

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