

Strategic Plan Goes Into Action

by Linda Holderness



After more than 20 years of planning, debating and working through a succession of hurdles, dirt will finally turn in Folsom's annexation area south of Highway 50 next year. It won't be homes yet—that's another three or so years away. What will get underway is what David Miller, the city's public works and community development director, calls the "backbone"—the complex, massive infrastructure of roads, water, sewer, fiberoptics and the like needed to serve the 10,200 homes to come, with recreation and commercial components the area will support when it's fully built. The project—3,513 acres bounded by Highway 50, White Rock Road, Prairie City Road and the El Dorado County line—is planned to be an extension of all that's good about Folsom now but with the opportunity to make it even better.

For the residents who have been following this project, there is satisfaction in a job well done. Folsom's citizens played

a major role in creating the land-use map that guides the parcel. In 2004, the community passed Measure W, which stipulated, among other actions, that the residents north of Highway 50 not be required to pay for infrastructure or tap their water supply, that existing schools not be subjected to overcrowding and that at least 30 percent of the project area be preserved as open space. Then, in 2007, residents participated in a series of charrettes to help design the plan map. The concept that emerged from these workshops, with few changes, became the proposal the Folsom City Council approved later that year. Now, as work is about to begin, only a few more modifications have been made to that original drawing. "This is the people's plan," says Steve Miklos, a City Council member and former mayor. "This plan was basically requested by the community, and this is what we want to do."

Despite the stringent stipulations, the four major landowners in the plan area—

Easton Development Co., WestLand Capital Partners, The New Home Company and Raintree—are not only complying with Measure W's requirements but also lauding them. "This is probably one of the greatest developments that has been approved in the past decade in this region, if not the broader California area," says Mike McDougall, president of MJM Properties, who is leading the development team for Westland Capital Partners. "It's a well-integrated plan with a healthy-living design." Because of Measure W, the area's landowners have taken on larger-than-usual financial responsibilities, including funding all of the infrastructure, parks, roads, bike trails and schools. The new area's future residents will eventually assume some of those costs through their Mello-Roos assessments. "Part of the requirement is that this area develop without creating any burden or decreasing any level of service to the residents in the north," says Michael LaFortune, Easton Development Company's senior development director, who lives in Folsom. "We, the owners, have taken that to heart. There is no drain on the north." In fact, by advancing more than \$1 million to bring water to the plan area, the landowners have reduced the Mello-Roos fees currently being paid by Broadstone residents.

The cost of the first phase of the infrastructure will be \$50 million of an anticipated \$800 million. If that sounds expensive, be assured Folsom will be getting good value for the money:

Open space: This has to be the area's crown jewel. As required by Measure W, 30 percent of the land in the plan area will be preserved open space—true open space, the landowners emphasize, which is in addition to parks. Most of it will be contained in a wide swath that follows

LAND USE

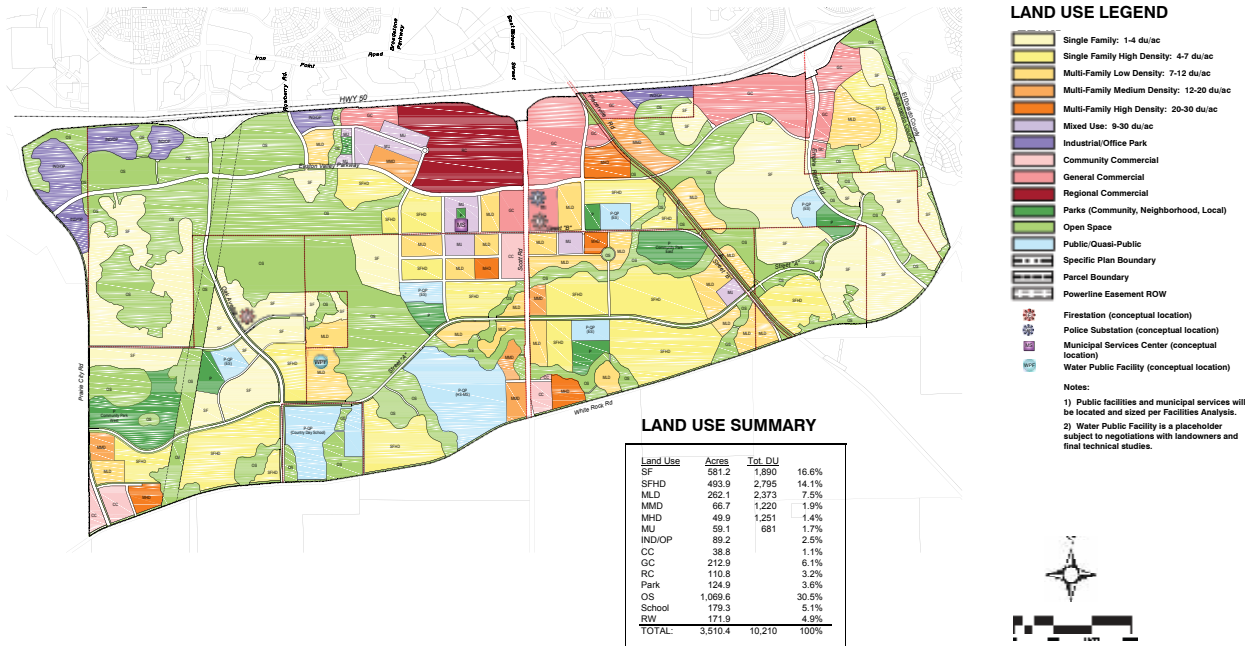


Figure 4.1 Land Use Plan

FOLSOM PLAN AREA SPECIFIC PLAN
Public Review Draft - January 2011

Alder Creek in the west portion of the area. Here, on terrain no one has seen for decades, are natural woodlands thick with native blue oaks, plus wetlands and creek corridors. The acreage abounds with wildlife. Trails will cross the area, but otherwise it will remain undisturbed.

Parks: In addition to the open space, the plan calls for two large community parks, 48 and 26 acres, with sports fields and other amenities, similar to Lembli Park, plus smaller parks of seven to 10 acres accessible to every neighborhood. Landowners are advancing \$15 million toward park development.

Schools: By the time the area builds out, Folsom will have a third public high school, another middle school and five more grade schools. Until they're available, Miller says, there is capacity for students to attend existing schools.

Transportation: This is one area in which the residents made strong demands and where the project now excels. In fact, with no dirt yet turned

over, the transit plan has already won awards for its success in lowering greenhouse emissions. "We were required (in the memorandum of understanding between Folsom and Sacramento County) to reduce them by 35 percent," McDougall says, "but we have achieved 42.5 percent." The centerpiece of the transportation plan is Easton Parkway, a "transit corridor" that runs parallel to and just south of Highway 50. The road, which is meant to keep vehicle traffic off the freeway, will connect from the El Dorado County line to the Hazel Avenue light rail station. Eventually, it's planned to extend to I-5 in Sacramento, giving travelers another route across the county. As the population grows, Easton Parkway will be widened to include bus rapid transit (BRT), which smooth the commutes with separate, fast-flowing lanes from which the buses can control their traffic lights. The routes will be timed to meet light rail schedules; in fact, the project can accommodate another Folsom light rail station. The road also connects the major areas within the project. In addition, both Oak Avenue Parkway and Row-

berry Drive will be extended to the plan area, with a new freeway interchange possible at Oak Avenue.

Town Center: Measure W demands walkability, and one way that requirement is being met is with a "town center" in the middle of the plan area, where Easton Parkway and Scott Road intersect. You see it on the plan map as a collection of small blocks surrounded by large, loose shapes—indicating high and low densities. The town center will be mixed-use with commercial, multi-family and single-family residential development, as well as civic buildings such as a city hall annex, community center, aquatic center and branch library. Here, Miklos says, "you can literally live, work and play without ever having to get into your car." And, adds, McDougall, without crossing any major roadways.

Bike trails: Folsom is known for its enviable trail system, 40 miles so far, with 10 more planned north of Highway 50. The annexation area will add 30 miles of Class 1 (paved) trails—a high density



for a space about 20 percent the size of the rest of the city. “We will have several major trails that run through the development,” says Jim Konopka, senior park planner for trails, who has won the city millions of dollars in grant money for trail construction. “One of our goals on the south side is to make sure that the trails connect to all the parks and schools and to the American River Parkway.” The rides will be beautiful, too, he adds, along rolling hills and some pristine expanses.

Housing: The final housing mix will be determined by the specific plans, but there will be something of everything, from high-density multi-family to 4,000-square-foot executive homes on large lots. However, Miller says, housing priorities have changed since the area was initially laid out, with less demand now for vast subdivisions and more for smaller homes in walkable areas. He also sees a stronger market for rentals and condos. Shopping preferences have modified, too, and the retail-housing mix may be altered to reflect that. The New Home Company, which will build Russell Ranch in the east portion of the plan area, is proposing to substitute housing on land previously designated for a regional mall. The terrain becomes foothills in that area, perfect for executive-style homes, says Project Manager Pierre Martinez. “We want to take advantage of the view opportunities on the hillsides. We’re trying to protect the typography in a way that looks great from the outside, as well as creating tremendous views for the people who live there. You can see well past Sacramento on a clear day.” The existing retail should be enough to

serve the plan area, Miller says, so some of the retail space will be converted to office use, adding jobs. The New Home Company is also proposing a private recreation facility—clubhouse, pool, meeting rooms—in addition to the public parks already designated.

Jobs: The plan area is expected to add about 13,000 jobs, just about in balance with the housing, which means people who live there will not necessarily have to commute downtown, Miller says. “The plan design encourages people to walk to work.”

Water: The stickiest demand of Measure W is its water restrictions: Providing water south of Highway 50 cannot reduce the water supply for users north of the highway or be paid for by them. Initially, the city was looking at bringing water from the Sacramento River to the plan area, an expensive undertaking that would require new pipelines. Then, in 2009, the state Senate passed a water conservation bill calling for every water purveyor to reduce usage by 20 percent. In October 2010, says Marcus Yasutake, Folsom’s director of environmental and water resources, the city of Folsom began a water management control program, both to reduce consumption and to determine if the current system was functioning properly. There were two results: Folsom residents conserved enthusiastically, and a pipeline at the Willow Creek reservoir was found to be heavily leaking. With these savings, plus a modification in the city’s water contract with Aerojet, Folsom recaptured about 6,500 acre feet of water, or about 25

percent of its total use, more than what is needed to meet the state’s mandate. The state is strict on how the saved water can be handled: It could simply be left in the lake; it could be sold; or it could be designated for a new use so long as that use didn’t return any of the water to the people who conserved it. The saved water was more than enough to supply the plan area, and the courts ruled it qualified as a new use. So, rather than relinquish or sell the water, Folsom is allocating it south of the freeway. However, Miklos adds emphatically, the city controls the water distribution and will carefully monitor its use for construction purposes in drought conditions.

History: You may be surprised to learn that there is evidence of gold mining in the plan area, says Lisa Westwood, a registered professional archaeologist with ECorp Consulting in Rocklin. This was really early, small-scale placer mining, individuals, as opposed to large mining companies, trying their luck along the creeks. “It’s exciting to see that type of mining,” she says. “But,” she adds, “not a lot of gold was coming out of there.” The mining evidence, along with Native American remnants found at the site, will be preserved—“that’s really important to the city,” Westwood says. Federal law prohibits disclosing whereabouts of archeological sites, but most of these are in the open space area, so development was not affected. Interpretive signs will be installed in some places, she adds.

A lot of hurdles still lie ahead before the first home in the annexation area goes up for sale, but the landowners, who meet together every week, are unanimously proud of their contributions to this project. “Folsom’s done a great job managing their community and protecting their citizens’ best interests,” McDougall says. “This is a project that we think will set a new standard. We hope it does.”

Steve Miklos agrees. “I’ve seen a lot of plans in the years I’ve been on the City Council and worked with SACOG (Sacramento Area Council of Governments),” he says. “I’ll pat ourselves on the back for this one. There is nothing not right with this plan.” •



Let us transform your home

Is your roof ready for winter?
Our 15 point inspection will make sure it
is! Prevent costly and damaging leaks!
Call today for your free estimate!

Reroof now for as low as \$200 a month.

Ask about financing!

1-800-734-7662 • www.tcroof.com

CSLB # 452675

BLUE WATERS GROUP GOES HERE