

Spotlight on: Moorpark

Southeast Ventura County City Poised for Development

Projects Would Add a Combined 4,600 Homes to the Community

By PAT KRAMER
Contributing Reporter

NESTLED in the southeastern corner of Ventura County, not far from the Los Angeles County border, the quiet city of Moorpark is fast gaining the attention of large residential developers.

No less than four separate development projects are under discussion in this city, once known for its agricultural economy and rural landscape.

The projects, which would add a combined 4,600 homes to the area, have generated animated debate in this quiet community.

"Development and growth tend to dominate issues in cities our size," says Moorpark Mayor Patrick Hunter. "A great number of our residents moved to Moorpark seeking to escape the urban sprawl that enveloped the San Fernando Valley and many parts of L.A. They moved here looking for the open space that surrounds the city."

In the 100 years since original title-holder Robert Poindexter mapped out the area (naming it Moorpark after the flavorful apricot that was found to thrive in the protected inland valley), this city has grown into an affluent suburb. Moorpark is home to a number of large and small businesses, including an increasing number of high-tech companies and a college that has gained national recognition.

Though citrus groves, poultry farms and the like still exist, the farms that once dotted the landscape have since moved to the outskirts of town, on both sides of the 118. In their place came homeowners, who first began seeking a respite from the city in the early 1980s.

Business soon followed, lured by competitive prices, a transportation infrastructure and convenient airport access. Commuters can travel the Los Angeles freeway system via Routes 23 and 118 and Moorpark has a Metrolink stop.

Industrial development, which peaked in 1984 and 1985 with the approval of 47 permits, has tapered off. But most recently, **Special Devices Inc.**, a Newhall manufacturer of devices to inflate airbags, is in the process of breaking ground on a site on New L.A. Avenue.

Today's Moorpark has a population of over 28,000, double the number of residents in 1984, according to the state Department of Finance.

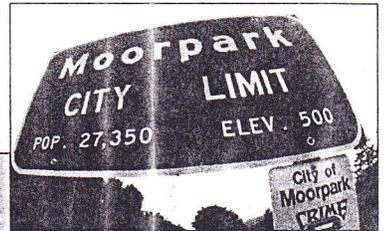
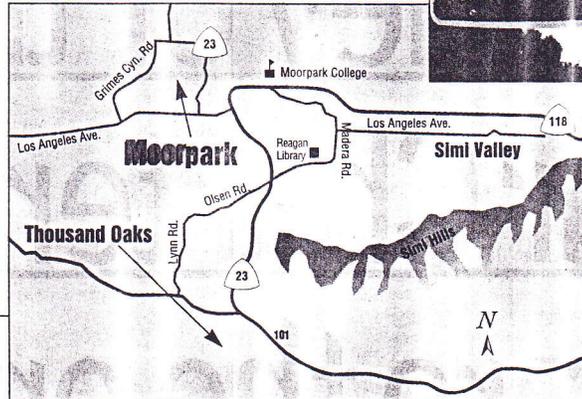
The area houses the 51-acre Moorpark

Business Center and the 57-acre Freeway Business Center accommodating larger companies. The 106-acre Moorpark Industrial Square caters to large, industrial complexes requiring more than 50,000 square feet; and the 33-acre Flinn Road Business Center is home to small and medium-sized businesses.

Kavlico, an automotive and aerospace electronics firm, is the top employer in the area with 1,000 employees, according to the Moorpark Chamber of Commerce. Other large employers include **Litton Data Systems**, **American Products**, **Mail Marketing** and **Teledyne/Laars**.

The industrial influx has helped to develop Los Angeles Avenue into a

On Jan. 22, after nearly eight years of debate, the council voted to certify Messenger's environmental impact report by a 3-1



Moorpark: The Mission Bell Plaza mall, far left, is part of the city's thriving retail community. Below, a new housing development adjacent to Moorpark Community College.

PHOTOS BY TODD FRANKEL / SFVBJ



vote with one council member not voting due to a conflict of interest. Hunter, who was the one opposing vote, explained that a history of oil extraction on the site has left the area contaminated.

The mayor is not the only one to raise

bustling retail center, and it has pumped up the area's economy, helping to bring the area's mean household income to \$64,000.

Meanwhile, Moorpark Community College, built in 1967, has become nationally recognized for its exotic animal-management studies curriculum and its on-campus zoo. The college, with an enrollment of 12,000 students, is a prime training ground for many professional animal handlers in film and TV, at zoos and at recreational facilities like Sea World.

An affluent community, rich in resources, is bound to draw the attention of residential developers, and Moorpark is no exception.

Among the projects before the City Council is the Hidden Creek Ranch project by developer **Messenger Investment Corp.** of Irvine, the largest and the most controversial of the developments under consideration. Messenger's plans include 2,400 to 3,200 homes, a golf course, a shopping center and an equestrian facility on 4,300 acres of land adjacent to the college.

questions. Nelson Miller, director of community development, said the city Planning Commission, while approving the project, noted that it could impact land use, aesthetics, traffic, air quality, water service, solid waste disposal and other areas.

Though the Moorpark Chamber of Commerce has been a proponent, Executive Director Carolyn Schrimpf notes that there are those who have fought against it. She describes that attitude as, "I've got mine, you can't have yours."

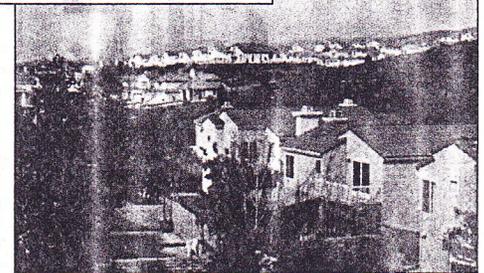
Moorpark Community College would likely suffer the greatest impact from the development of Hidden Creek Ranch. The college would probably see an increase in traffic, particularly at the intersection of Collins Street and Campus Park.

At the same time, Moorpark College President Jim Walker pointed out that the development would also benefit the school. "The obvious impact would be to increase our enrollment and, economically speaking, that

would be very positive for the college. When enrollment increases, it brings in more dollars and you can turn around and hire more full-time faculty. You can expand your offerings, you can become more comprehensive and offer more than when you're small," he said.

Gary Wilson, a faculty member in the exotic animal studies program, views the development with mixed emotions. "In '75, when I was a student here, we were in the middle of nowhere. There was a rural feel to it. (Since then) it has increasingly been surrounded by housing development, and I see the loss of the hills and wild areas with some regret."

Hidden Creek will now move into Phase Two, with new public hearings scheduled to examine its potential impact on the city's schools, traffic, access, circulation and other issues. Because the proposed site is unincorporated land, annexation of the development to the city would be required.



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