



Shafter – May 18

When you invite Lorelei Oviatt to talk about planning and land use issues, be prepared for an earful!

Air rules: She started off with how pleased she is to see the South Coast Air Quality Management District finally getting onboard with an “indirect source rule (ISR),” which forces developers to find ways to compensate for the extra vehicle miles their development (whether commercial or residential) will create.

The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District has lived under an ISR for the better part of a decade. So, a nearby basin without such a rule “really put the valley at a competitive disadvantage,” Oviatt said.

With both areas under essentially the same rules, the valley could be more attractive to new and expanding businesses.

Especially, Oviatt said, since “We’ve had this for years. We know how to implement it and have made the process very clear to developers.”

As soon as the South Coast AQMD approves its ISR, she said, locals should trumpet how smooth and simple the Valley’s ISR is to work through. “Market it to all businesses, warehouses, logistics, really get it out there and market the valley using it!”

Housing crisis: We hear so much about California’s housing crisis. But Oviatt could only shake her head at the state’s attempts to “fix” the problem. The Legislature passed a slew of laws (35) passed by the Legislature last year that Oviatt called “command and control” laws.

None of those laws came with any relief from CEQA requirements, she noted. Affordable housing units have greater requirements for durability, prevailing wage, etc., than regular units, but no relief there from the state either. And none of those 35 laws took into account the issue of water and how the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) may limit the amount of water that can be used for housing.





One state estimate indicates Kern needs to build 11,000 units a year to keep up with our 38,000 homeless or housing insecure population. Oviatt noted at the height of the housing boom, the most units ever built in Kern was 6,000.

Getting our cut: Oviatt explained how valley counties are joining forces to try and get a bigger cut of the \$75 fee attached to every

document that's signed and filed in a housing transaction. (Also passed last year and supposed to be dedicated to helping ease homelessness.)

Bigger counties, which already have more resources, therefore more programs typically get the lion's share of similar statewide funds leaving scraps for rural counties. In this case, Oviatt said, valley counties are seeking to have a chunk set aside just for us and then we'll compete with one another for that chunk.

"A lot of us feel like, if we have to compete with San Francisco and LA, is it even worth it?"

General Plan: There are a lot of new climate change mandates from the state, which don't make a lot of sense for valley counties – such as how we should handle sea level rise.

Instead, Oviatt said the county is approaching the issue by looking at Kern through a larger lens.



"We will have a 'safety' section to look at everything from wildfire threats to water and soil instability," she said.

As SGMA takes effect and more cropland is fallowed, as is expected, will we see the kind of "dunes" that have become the norm in eastern Kern County as land was fallowed there? (As a side note, she said she is looking at a large USDA grant to tackle this issue.)

The GP also will have a healthy communities element to look at gaps in health care, food deserts, the lack of proper grocery stores in isolated areas, etc.

Water quality: Oviatt briefly touched on the budget trailer bill that BizFed CV board members voted to support that would create a small tax on water sales to pay to clean up substandard drinking water systems throughout the valley.

"If that doesn't go through," she said, "I don't know where we'll get the money. There is no other funding mechanism to fix those systems."



Grants: Speaking of funding, Oviatt said the county is creating a task force aimed at getting grant funding.

“People ask why we don’t get more grants, it’s because we aren’t ready.”

She noted Alameda County has a staff of four doing nothing but researching and writing grants.

First, though, Kern will identify the top 5 projects it would like to tackle in the

categories of water/sewer, parks and libraries. Once those are set, the county will get environmental impact reports done so when staffers find grant opportunities “We’ll be ready!”

It’s a more focused method, she said.

County change: In recent years, Oviatt said, the county has changed its focus from home building as a revenue generator to businesses.

Housing doesn’t pay the cost of required county services unless the homes sell for around \$400,000.

Businesses, though, pay their own freight and more. In order to make it easier for businesses to locate here, Oviatt has been creating maps so potential businesses can look online and see where they can and can’t conduct different types of industry.

Such as egg farming.

She explained how a chicken rancher recently settled near Pond with 20 million chickens after looking the county over and working with Oviatt to get all the permitting.

“It was so funny,” she recalled. “I had no idea how egg farming worked so I asked, ‘Wow 20 million chickens, so how will you bring them here?’ And the rancher was very earnest and slowly explained to me, ‘Well, Lorelei, see we start with a fertilized egg...then we put it in an incubator...’”

So, now we know which came first (at least in Kern County)!

