

Local

Sunday, December 14, 2014

■ FIRES DISPLACE 13

A flurry of residential fires, including one at an apartment complex in Port Hueneme, displace at least 13 people across Ventura County. **10B**



Simi could benefit from Deerlake plan

■ Development in L.A. County touted as boon

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Simi Valley could reap economic benefits from a planned high-end residential development just east of the Ventura

County line, officials say.

Residents of the planned 314-home Deerlake Ranch project a few miles from Simi Valley in neighboring Los Angeles County could frequent the city's retail businesses,



said Brian Gabler, the city's economic development director.

And CEOs who move into the development of seven-figure homes in an unincorporated area north of the San Fernando Valley could

relocate their businesses to Simi Valley, Gabler said.

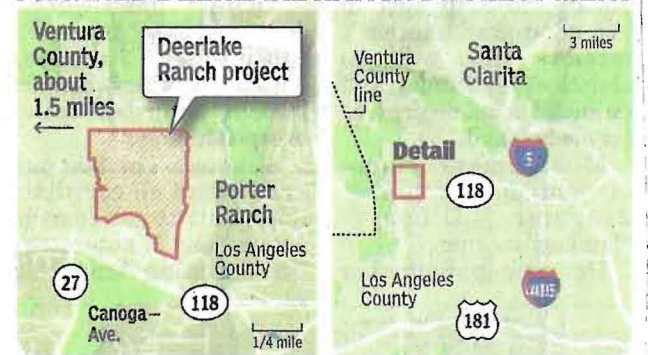
"The cost of doing business in Simi Valley is less than it is in Los Angeles," he said.

The Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Housing & Economic Development did not return calls seeking comment.

Ventura County Supervisor Peter Foy, whose

See DEERLAKE, 3B

PLANNED DEERLAKE RANCH DEVELOPMENT



SCRIPPS NEWSPAPER

LOCAL

DEERLAKE
from 1B

district includes Simi Valley, said the city's construction industry could be called on to help build the development north of Highway 118 next to Porter Ranch.

"Hopefully, we're going to get some good construction work out of it," he said. "Hopefully, our cement companies will be delivering cement and product. So from that standpoint, the construction side of it would be really good for our people locally."

Once the development is built, other Simi businesses could be hired for maintenance work, landscaping and other jobs, Foy said.

Construction is expected to begin in late 2015 or early 2016, said Steve Cameron, president of Foremost Communities. The Orange County real estate investment firm bought the project site, 230 acres of undeveloped hillside land, for an undisclosed price. Homebuyers could start moving in by 2017 or 2018, he said.

ENVIRONMENTAL
CONCERNS

Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks,

speaking as chairwoman of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, has environmental concerns about the project.

Parks said Deerlake Ranch, as well as Hidden Creeks, a nearby planned gated community also in unincorporated Los Angeles County, "exemplify the worst in sprawl development."

"Both are at the same edge of the city on steep terrain, unnecessarily grading and destroying large areas of natural habitat," said Parks, a driving force behind Ventura County's slow-growth Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources — or SOAR — laws.

The two projects are in the Santa Susana Mountains, which fall within the conservancy's purview, Parks said.

Cameron said Los Angeles County approved Deerlake Ranch after taking its impacts into consideration. County supervisors greenlighted the development a decade ago despite opposition from neighbors. But the previous owner's plans died with the economic downturn.

“We’ve looked at buying land up there, but we just haven’t been successful yet. The SOAR initiative has just made it very hard to find land to build on.”

Steve Cameron, president of Foremost Communities

"The project has been reduced from 375 lots down to 314 lots," Cameron said. "I think it's a wonderful project and it's going to provide housing for 314 families."

Gabler, meanwhile, said one concern the city has is possible additional traffic the development will bring to nearby Highway 118, which runs through Simi Valley.

Cameron said there is no cause for worry.

"There will be 314 additional families driving on the 118," he said. "Those freeways are designed to handle a lot of people. A few hundred more trips a day won't make a significant impact."

KNOLLS RESIDENTS
UNFAZED

Residents of Santa Susana Knolls, an unincorporated area of Ventura County east of Simi Valley near the Los

Angeles County border, last year got a planned residential development in the Knolls killed.

But they aren't particularly concerned about Deerlake Ranch, which is about 2 miles away, said Knolls resident Dawn Kowalski, who actively opposed the planned Knolls development.

"We are definitely more focused on Simi and more specifically on the Knolls," she said.

The Knolls project was killed on a 3-2 vote by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors. Foy, whose district includes the Knolls, voted for the project.

Deerlake Ranch's single-family homes will be priced between \$1.2 million and \$1.7 million on lots ranging from 5,000 square feet to a half-acre.

Sixty of the lots are large enough to keep horses on, Cameron said.

Equestrian trails run throughout the site.

Cameron said many real estate investors like his company are more interested these days in building high-end projects because they sell well. Affluent buyers frequently can pay with cash, whereas it's tough for middle-income buyers to get mortgages for more modestly priced homes because of tighter lending restrictions, he said.

Foremost has projects in several Southern California counties, but not Ventura County.

"We'd love to," Cameron said. "We've looked at buying land up there, but we just haven't been successful yet. The SOAR initiative has just made it very hard to find land to build on."

Ventura County's SOAR law requires voter approval to develop farmland and open space in unincorporated areas. Most of the county's cities also have SOAR laws. Many of those laws are set to expire in 2020.

Backers are proposing 2016 ballot initiatives that would extend the laws until 2050.