

WHY OUR COALITION OPPOSES **California Forever & the Ballot Initiative**



What is California Forever's ballot initiative?

California Forever seeks signatures for a ballot initiative, aiming to rezone 17,500 acres in eastern Solano County. The initiative proposes changing the land use designation from Agricultural to "New Community," allowing development for up to 400,000 residents and 90 million square feet of non-residential space (1). Voter approval is necessary because the project is in conflict with the County's General Plan and the Orderly Growth Ordinance, established in 1980 to prevent sprawl development (2). Voters should be clear on what they are voting on—the rezoning of agricultural land for a new city in a remote area of Solano County, a decision that will fundamentally change the landscape and way of life in the region.

What about the "voter guarantees"? Are they enforceable if the measure passes?

No, the so-called guarantees touted by the initiative backers have no legally enforceable mechanisms. Under California law, a ballot measure cannot legally obligate the County to agree to specific provisions in a Development Agreement, which must be negotiated independently between the developer and the local governing body - no ballot measure can require or enforce specific provisions be included in that agreement (3). Additionally, any negotiated community benefits in an agreement with the County would only be binding if the new city remains unincorporated; If California Forever eventually incorporates, all agreements would be invalid (4)(5).

If California Forever's initiative passes in November, what happens next?

If passed, Flannery Associates would then begin negotiations with the County for a Development Agreement (DA), while also seeking funding and approvals from state and county sources for public components such as transportation upgrades, utility connections, water infrastructure, and schools. Flannery Associates has already announced that they will be requesting public funds for a portion of these upgrades, in direct competition with other areas in Solano County and throughout the state.

As a Solano County resident, why should I care about what happens in Eastern Solano County?

The proposed "new community" would require substantial investments in transportation and water infrastructure, which would have to be carried out in partnership with Solano County agencies. Though California Forever sponsors say they'll "pay their fair share," the remaining costs will burden County agencies and other public entities that have to foot the bill (6). This "cost-sharing" approach would result in increased taxes and utility bills, or de-funding of existing projects in the pipeline to pay for California Forever's new infrastructure (7).

Constructing new homes could draw higher-income residents away from existing cities—leaving Solano's seven cities to figure out how to provide essential services with dwindling tax revenue. This cycle can lead to neglected infrastructure, reduced support for local services, and an overall decline in the socio-economic health of the region.

How will the California Forever development impact traffic in Solano County?

California Forever's sprawl project would result in significant traffic issues due to its distance from existing jobs and amenities and lack of connections to transit. Over two-thirds (67%) of Solano residents work outside the County, with over 11,000 residents commuting to San Francisco alone (8).

In short, the Bay Area is an interconnected region and building a new city of 400,000 residents in a place that lacks transit connections will only force those new residents to drive, which will increase traffic, especially on Highways 12, 113, and I-80, and local pollution, while contributing to harmful greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants.

How will California Forever impact water resources?

A new city would burden already scarce water resources and put supply for existing residents at risk. Flannery Associates' has discussed pulling water from the Solano Subbasin, which was overdrafted in the 1960s. Using this groundwater resource to support a new city could significantly strain the Subbasin, resulting in depletion, subsidence, and severe water security issues (9). Using more water from the Sacramento River and its tributaries is also highly problematic when considering that California's surface water supplies are already oversubscribed by 500%, meaning that water rights claims are five times greater than the amount of water that actually exists (10). The Solano County Water Agency has already voted to discontinue conversations with California Forever, and the continued lack of information on how this project will get enough water to support a population the size of Oakland suggests that project proponents still have no plan for achieving sufficient water resources without significant harm to the communities, economies, and ecosystems that rely on the region's limited water resources.

Why is this land important to protect?

The 17,500 acres earmarked for California Forever's development are far from vacant; they currently sustain regenerative farming practices, providing food, fiber, and carbon storage equivalent to emissions from 73,804 vehicles for a year (11). This land nurtures vital habitat, supports Delta ecosystems, and enables water permeability and groundwater recharge (12). Additionally, almost 7,000 acres are crucial vernal pool habitats, hosting endangered species like the California Tiger Salamander, Swainson's Hawk, Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp, and more. Over 90% of California's vernal pools have already been lost to development (13).

Would this project bring high-paying jobs to Solano residents? Will Travis Air Force Base be protected?

No. Under their definition of job creation, a remote worker who moves to the new community with an existing job would count as a "job created." (14) There is no mechanism for developers to ensure job creation and jobs attracted to this area would be most likely at the expense of economic development efforts of existing cities. Travis is the County's largest employer (15) and the placement of this new city jeopardizes Travis' mission and operations, even with the addition of a "buffer zone." (16)

Will California Forever provide affordable housing?

California Forever's initiative does not include any inclusion of below market rate (BMR) housing.. Additionally, on average, residents of sprawling communities pay an additional \$2,568 per year due to the cost of services and infrastructure, with even greater costs being incurred by the community at large. With the number of assessments and fees required to fund the infrastructure and services needed for this project, it is unlikely that this new community will be affordable to most Solano County residents.

Solano Together is a coalition of concerned residents, leaders, and organizations who came together to envision a better future for our region that focuses development into existing cities and strengthens our agricultural industry.

We aim to keep our community informed and engaged as the project evolves. Join our mailing list for more updates.

[1] [East Solano Homes, Jobs, and Clean Energy Initiative](#) (submitted to Solano County registrar of voters on February 14, 2024).

[2] Solano County General Plan, [Ordinance 2008-01](#).

[3] Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice v. City of Moreno Valley, 26 Cal. App. 5th 689 (2018)

[4] [Rezoning of 17,500 Acres of Land in East Solano County to Allow the Development of a New Community](#). Solano County Counsel, Retrieved from Registrar of Voters

[5] [Tech-billionaire promises for a new city, from roads to water, are worth hundreds of millions of dollars — if they're binding](#), L. Sumagaysay and B. Christopher, CalMatters

[6] ["California Forever" CEO defends controversial plan to build new Solano County city](#), SF Chronicle

[7] [Fresno's urban sprawl policies linked to decades of poverty, blight in new study](#), Gregory Weaver, FresnoLand

[8] [On the Map](#), US Census Bureau, 2021 data for All Workers

[9] [Solano Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan](#)

[10] [California Water Impact Network via Maven's Notebook](#)

[11] [Bay Area Greenprint Report](#)

[12] [Knee Deep Times](#)

[13] [US EPA](#)

[14] [Defense Related Industries \(TAFB\)](#), Solano EDC

[15] [Reps. Thompson and Garamendi Discuss California Forever](#), Youtube

[16] [Analysis of Public Policies that Unintentionally Encourage and Subsidize Urban Sprawl](#), Todd Litman, Victoria Transport Policy Institute