

The Las Lomas housing project

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Confusion surrounds it, but one thing is clear. L.A. doesn't need it.

In 2002, the City Council maybe did, but maybe didn't, commit Los Angeles to annexing a piece of unincorporated county land near the Newhall Pass where developer Dan Palmer wants to build 5,553 homes. Palmer did, or maybe didn't, actually have control of all 555 acres when he signed documents to that effect, and the true owner of six of the 14 parcels might have, or might not have, authorized Palmer to seek development permits for the land. The city's Planning Department maybe did, but maybe didn't, compel itself to complete an environmental impact study on the project when it began the work several years ago. A motion by Councilman Richard Alarcon to require Palmer's company to pay the city's costs for processing the paperwork maybe would, or perhaps would not, force the city to reopen proceedings to annex the land and to approve the development.

This is the present state of Las Lomas, the housing development that Palmer wants to build where the Antelope Valley Freeway meets Interstate 5. The project has been clogging the calendars of lobbyists and the flow of business at government permitting desks the way a jackknifed 18-wheeler near the McBean Parkway offramp clogs traffic during the morning commute. Now it's in front of the City Council, in the form of a motion by Councilman Greig Smith -- who probably would be the councilman for Las Lomas, if the project was even in Los Angeles -- to once and for all say yes or no to moving forward with the development. Smith wants the council to say no. So do we.

In order to win the hearts of policymakers and to keep up with the times, Las Lomas has been reconfigured from a sprawling housing development to the supposed model of smart growth, with villages of environmentally sensitive multifamily dwellings linked by trails and shuttles through green park buffers and ample open space. Electric cars would deliver groceries, which would be ordered through a concierge. Shuttles would take kids to school and adults directly to work or, at least, to the Metrolink station.

But like many self-styled smart-growth projects, this one is essentially idiotic. Open space near Santa Clarita, where I-5 traffic moves into and out of the basin, is no place for a dense new development that would create as many as 66,000 new daily vehicle trips -- not when the city has so many opportunities within its present borders to encourage construction of market-rate and affordable infill housing. And the notion that Los Angeles should extend its borders and commit its bureaucracy to paperwork for the privilege of adding a new minicity is, well, just plain dumb.

Palmer's team may (or may not) be on solid legal ground in its claim that the City Council already committed itself to a study. But if the city doesn't want Las Lomas -- and it shouldn't -- continuing the process is anything but smart.