

Rancho San Juan Opposition Coalition

Committee Against Measure C

August 28, 2006

Mayor Anna Caballero and Salinas City Council
Salinas City Hall
200 Lincoln Avenue
Salinas, CA 93901

Chairman Jerry Smith and the Monterey County Board of Supervisors
168 West Alisal Street
Salinas, CA 93902

RE: Greater Salinas Area Memorandum of Understanding

Dear Chairman Smith, Mayor Caballero, Board and Council Members:

Last fall, 76% of Monterey County voters rejected Rancho San Juan, a massive and disastrous project that was negotiated behind closed doors under cover of “pending litigation.” Without any environmental review or public participation, all project details were negotiated through a legally questionable “Stipulated Agreement,” which developers now seek to enforce at great cost to County residents, Salinas residents included.

The City of Salinas, among others, sued Monterey County over the environmental impacts of Rancho San Juan. It is only logical that the heart of any legal settlement would be solutions to and mitigations for Rancho San Juan’s environmental impacts. Instead, borrowing a page from the Rancho San Juan playbook, behind closed doors the City and the County negotiated a strategic pact for urbanizing North Monterey County. Instead of eliminating or reducing Rancho San Juan’s impacts to roads, water and quality of life, the City and the County have agreed through this MOU to make these problems infinitely worse. The MOU ignores public interest and defies public expectation.

The City of Salinas has endorsed the massive growth envisioned in the County’s GPU4, including Rancho San Juan – before completion of environmental review of GPU4 and before conclusion of public testimony. In turn, the County has agreed to support the City’s 2005 proposal to LAFCO to annex 3000 acres of prime agricultural land north and east of the City as well as land south of the City (#2 & #3). These votes have been promised in advance of a public hearing, which is illegal under the Brown Act.

Agricultural land south and west of the City is to be protected (#4) by conservation easements “insofar as the easements are consistent with the adopted General Plans of the two jurisdictions.” State General Plan Law allows jurisdictions to amend their General Plans four times per year, which renders this so-called protection useless. In fact, this MOU provides no protection whatsoever for agricultural land.

According to the MOU, there is much “consultation” which is supposed to occur between the City and the County on various development and growth proposals; but consultation does not equal agreement, and therefore the MOU is likely to become a target of increased litigation between the City and the County.

Finally, the level of development contemplated by the MOU will make it impossible to provide “adequate financing for the services and facilities of benefit to the residents of the Greater Salinas Area Plan area and the City.” Furthermore, the infrastructure crisis created will ultimately strip other areas of the county of their fair share of infrastructure dollars, despite the MOU’s newly-minted but completely undefined “Salinas Area Traffic Impact Fee.”

It must be pointed out that none of the road segments mapped for improvement by the so-called Salinas Area Traffic Impact Fee is included in TAMC’s \$930 million list of projects in its Nexus Study for a Regional Development Impact Fee. The Nexus study reveals that sprawl has outstripped, by \$651 million, our ability to pay for the roads to support it. It must also be pointed out that one of the MOU’s mapped road segments running along Old Stage Road, the Eastside Expressway, was briefly adopted as a preferred alternative to the Prunedale Bypass during the review period for Rancho San Juan’s DEIR. According to TAMC, the estimated cost for the Eastside Expressway was \$380 million and its estimated traffic capacity was 30,000 average daily vehicle trips. Traffic generated by Rancho San Juan alone is more than twice what the Eastside Expressway could accommodate.

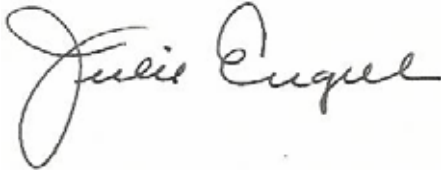
Along with traffic problems, water problems in the Greater Salinas Area and North County are long-standing and well-documented. The Salinas Valley Water Project (SVWP) remains un-built and unproven. According to the SVWP EIR, if no water supply project is built, pumping in the Salinas Basin would need to be reduced by 30% to 50% in order to halt salt water intrusion. Even if built, the project EIR states that it will only halt salt water intrusion until 2030, at which time a direct distribution system would need to be built at a cost of \$42 million – a distribution system that has not been presented to or voted upon by county residents. Furthermore, existing water supply and quality problems were the basis of California Water Company’s 2004 request to the PUC for rate increases totaling 62% over a three-year period. CalWater is the major water purveyor for Salinas with 100,000 customers and is the planned water purveyor for Rancho San Juan.

Massive residential development on the scale contemplated in the GSA-MOU will not generate revenues sufficient to avert water and road crises. However, county votes in combination with Salinas’ weighted vote on TAMC will always assure the necessary majority to siphon project funding from other areas of the county to ameliorate the inevitable gridlock in the Greater Salinas Area created by this MOU.

The fact of the matter is, this MOU accomplishes NONE of its stated objectives and causes serious concerns about its unstated objectives among the overwhelming majority of voters who rejected Rancho San Juan last year.

We urge the Monterey County Board of Supervisors and the Salinas City Council NOT to ratify the Greater Salinas Area Memorandum of Understanding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Engell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Engell, Chair
Rancho San Juan Opposition Coalition