



SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Blue Oak Group



Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

Smart Growth *by Addison Winslow*

Growth that is “smart” is both environmentally and financially sustainable. “Smart” growth occurs in the core of a city, at nodes of high-quality public transit, jobs, and services, and spread throughout neighborhoods that are already built but may have infrastructure in need of repair and improvement. Smart growth is progressive improvement within the fabric of an established city.

That makes “dumb” growth, in this schema, subdivisions on the periphery or outside the urban area, bulldozing habitat and open space, demanding

all new infrastructure, and built so inefficiently that the taxes generated by the development cannot cover the expense of public services and maintenance. The density cannot support walkable services or reliable public transit, so most people depend on cars. From this, we can trace a direct line to the extreme heat, drought, and wildfires plaguing our region, as well as the broader collapse of biodiversity worldwide. It is also bad for the pavement, and requires carving wide roads that make urban areas dangerous and unpleasant.

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Smart Growth *continued from p. 1*

If referring to “dumb” growth, however, we should be careful not to imply that there were no compelling reasons suburban sprawl proliferated in the entire country following World War II.

We would also be mistaken in assuming that smart growth requires an advanced level of intelligence. In fact, if we didn’t have the laws and regulations in place that make suburban sprawl continue to be the dominant pattern of development in our region, smart growth would be intuitive. Smart growth is the way Chico began as a city, because it was the way people built cities for thousands of years, and the way every city Chico’s founder knew was built.

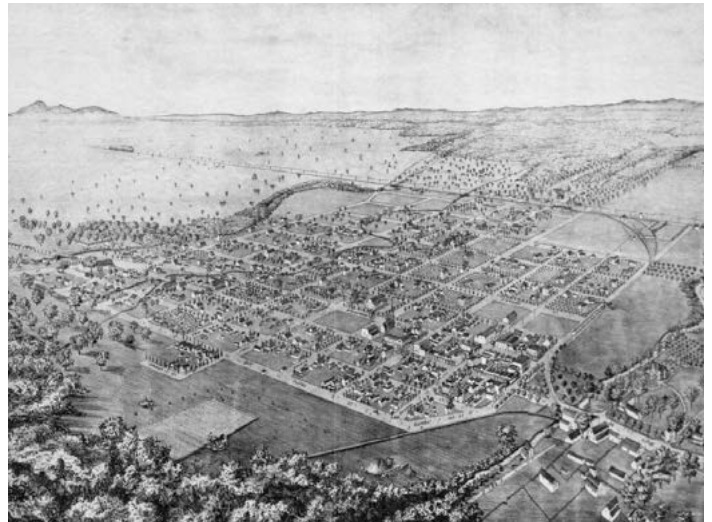
When the Downtown Chico grid was laid in 1860, John Bidwell gave away pieces of land to churches, groups, and individuals he deemed worthy. All land ownership in Chico from Little Chico Creek north originates from Bidwell’s sales and gifts, like the Olympians all trace their heritage to Cronos.

Blocks in the grid were gradually improved with buildings and parks. While downtown Chico was re-engineered in the 1950-60s, the purpose of its original design is unmistakable: short blocks, narrow streets; buildings that are more massive than elsewhere, more visually appealing to passerby, and not setback from the street. Downtown was designed for feet. Wagons were accommodated, but did not dominate.

With the arrival of the Diamond Match Company around 1903, in less than a decade Chico developed an electric streetcar network extravagant by today’s standards. Barber, the Avenues, and much of Chapmantown were built as streetcar suburbs. Residences were mostly built near a main road, where a streetcar line connected citizens to the Downtown, and to the mills and factories at the ends of town. The neighborhood streets were also built for walking, because every transit journey begins and ends with a walk.

The core neighborhoods are Chico’s most characteristic and architecturally rich, the result of countless acts of gradual improvement.

Chico’s streetcar system rapidly declined after WWII, ushering in an era of suburban sprawl. New development was designed and scaled for car traffic. Low population densities were locked in by zoning ordinance. New street networks were hierarchical



Bird's eye view of Chico, 1871

rather than gridded, leaving travelers no option but to crowd onto a few major roads; roughly the opposite of Chico’s flood control infrastructure where currents are divided between channels.

To city leaders, suburban sprawl didn’t seem dumb at the time. When Chico extended services to the Longfellow neighborhood, it was imagined as a walkable setting removed from the ruckus, decay, and relative racial diversity of the city center, yet comfortably accessible by car. But, between the low

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Newsletter Information

Blue Oak Group News is published four times a year, in March, June, September, and December, by the Blue Oak Group of the Sierra Club, P.O. Box 2012, Chico, CA 95927.

For changes in mailing address or email address, contact Suzette Welch, booksontape@rocketmail.com.

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Please include name, phone number, and address with each submittal. Short, single-topic articles are preferred. Deadlines for proposed articles and letters to the editor: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

Blue Oak Group News reserves the right to edit all submissions for reasons of space, clarity and potential libel. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Sierra Club or the Blue Oak Group.

Blue Oak Group Summer 2022 Outings

Coordinated by Alan Mendoza. For updated outings information, and for general information about outings and meetings places, please see our website:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/blue-oak/outings>

Tuesdays, 7–8PM Volleyball

Ongoing Tuesday Volleyball. Join Blue Oak Group members and friends for friendly, co-ed volleyball every Tuesday night at 7PM at the Chapman Center (corner of E. 16th Street and B Street in Chico). Cost: \$6 per night. Free lessons included. For more information call Betty 530-588-8918 or Alan 530-891-8789

Friday–Sunday, September 16–18 Car Camp and Day Hikes (2,B) Lakes Basin

Spend a fun weekend with us in hiker's paradise at the stunning, glacier-carved Lakes Basin area near Graeagle. We will camp at the Lakes Basin Campground starting on Friday. Great optional hikes each day to the top of Mt. Elwell, Bear, Cub, Long Lake or up to the PCT along with great swimming in a nearby swimming hole. About a 125 mile drive from Chico off the Gold Lake Highway near Graeagle/Blairsden. Individual commissary and bring all your own camping equipment. No RVs allowed. Limited space. Email or call leader to reserve a spot and pay for campsite. Cost \$10 per person for the 2 nights. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza666@gmail.com; Asst. Leader: Ed Schilling.

Saturday, September 24 Day Hike (2,B) -Deer Creek Day Hike

Take a 5-6 mile, cool, shaded round trip walk through the reds, yellows and greens of fall as we follow the rush of beautiful Deer Creek in the Lassen National Forest. We'll begin at the trail just off of Highway 32 and hike downstream. Bring water, lunch and carpool \$. Rain cancels. Return at approximately 3PM. Meet at Chico Park and Ride at 9 AM. Leader; Ed, 530-715-5167 or enschilling@hotmail.com; Asst. leader; Alan, 530-891-8789.

Sunday, October 30 Day Hike (1,A) - Chico State Arboretum (Educational)

Join us to discuss and walk through the history of downtown Chico and see the many plants and trees from all over the world on the Chico State campus. A 2-3 mile stroll with lots of stops along the way to observe how the downtown and campus area has evolved through time. Meet at 10AM at the Bidwell Mansion parking lot. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza666@gmail.com

Saturday, November 12 Day Hike (2,B) – North Rim Trail (Conservation)

Enjoy upper Bidwell Park on a 7-8 mile hike on the North Rim Trail. Along the way we will get great views of Chico and the surrounding area and see on-going efforts to protect the park. We will then descend on a rough trail to pick up the Middle Trail and eventually drop down to the Yahi Trail. Rain cancels. Bring lunch, water and carpool \$. Meet at Horseshoe Lake parking lot at 9AM. Leader: Ed, 530-715-5167 or enschilling@hotmail.com; Asst. leader: Alan, 530-891-8789

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Forestry News

by Trish Puterbaugh

As I write this we have had some late June rains and our Sierra Mountains are getting precipitation in recent weeks, this is good news. The humidity has also been higher which keeps moisture in the forest. As a foothill dweller, I am always hopeful that maybe this year will be better! Its been a beautiful summer! Unfortunately however, there are fires burning in Northern California.

The US Forest Service in Plumas and Lassen is very busy responding to the Dixie Fire. They have started logging dead trees along roads and will start in campgrounds and recreation areas soon. There is also a region wide “hazard tree project” winding its way through the regulatory process. Everyone agrees dead trees need to be logged where they may be dangerous to humans and infrastructure. However, there is disagreement about how much to “salvage” in other forested areas. Generally all wilderness areas, including Lassen National Park will be left to natural processes.

Most everyone sees that prescribed fire will be our most valuable tool in the future to “manage” our forests, especially areas that have burned. We have a Butte County Prescribed Fire Association (PBA) assisting private land owners with burn plans and ecological prescribed fire. It is quite exciting to see the enthusiasm of fire fighters and forest workers for this critical work. The push is to educate and train many leaders who will be able to guide landowners all over the state in this valuable work.

I have mentioned the plans for the West Lassen Watershed Project and the Upper Butte Creek Project. Those projects will be in planning for at least another year before work on the ground. The West Shore project at Lake Almanor and in recreation areas there will be starting soon.

Here in Cohasset and other foothill communities we have benefited from many grants, usually administered by the Butte County Fire Safe Council. The state and federal government are heavily committing to forest health, fuel breaks, thinning



California Newt. Photo by Trish Peterbaugh

evacuation routes, clearing around homes and other important forest work. Communities are really coming together to make their neighborhoods more firesafe. Even PG&E is a welcome site, as there are so many dead trees in the foothills.

The extreme drought, a century of fire suppression, more homes in the woods, and poor management practices have taken a heavy toll on our wildlands. I am hopeful we can use grazing, thinning small trees, prescribed fire, and other ecological practices to “tend our wild” and return it to an ecosystem that is resilient to change.

Smart Cycling

by David Welch

Having ridden a bicycle for sport and for transportation for more than 50 years, I believe strongly that more people biking makes for a better community. More bicycles mean cleaner air, less crowded roads, more positive human interaction, and a healthier population. A lot of people tell me they would like to ride a bike more, but don't feel safe sharing the road with cars. The truth is, Chico and other valley towns are pretty easy and safe places to bike – IF you know how to do it right. And there is a “critical mass” effect – the more people ride, the safer we are. So I'm excited to help people learn the tricks and develop the skills to ride safely and confidently on city streets.



You might be surprised to learn that the Butte County Health Department has a program to teach “Smart Cycling,” using materials and techniques from the League of American Bicyclists. Preventing trauma, including bicycle crashes, is a natural part of a public health department's mission. A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to become certified as an LCI – “League Cycling Instructor” so that I could teach those classes. The COVID pandemic slowed the program down for a while, but we are finally getting going now. One side of our work is school “bike rodeos,” in which we teach basic cycling skills to school children. And we are now getting the adult program rolling. We've had recent classes for groups of city employees and hope to expand to other employee groups and, hopefully, the general public. Keep your eyes open for classes coming in the future. In the meantime, you can learn a lot about safer cycling on the website of the League of American Bicyclists: <https://www.bikeleague.org/ridesmart>

Smart Growth Advocates

by Elizabeth Devereaux

If you love the small-town feel of Chico, prepare to let it go the way of Fresno—IF we don't stop the mega-development called Valley's Edge. Valley's Edge is just the “tip of the iceberg,” with development envisioned all the way down to Butte College on the East side of Highway 99. The Valley's Edge developers have proposed building 2777 units on 1448 acres of Southeastern Foothills.

AFFORDABILITY: Most of these are moderate to luxury homes, not desperately needed affordable homes.

THE OAK WOODLAND SAVANNA:

Developing these homes will mean cutting down approximately 1000 slow-growing blue oaks, building over vernal pools, and destroying habitat for many wild animals and birds. The beauty of this land is understated, with profuse wildflowers of California Goldfields, larkspur, Butte County Meadowfoam, and many more.

TRAFFIC: The Draft EIR states that for the adjacent development, Stonegate, and Valley's Edge, there would be an estimated 23,000 car trips a day, creating much more traffic, pollution, and carbon emissions. In the EIR of Stonegate these emissions cannot be mitigated. Though they developers contend that public transit will be available, it is not actually feasible as designed.

WATER: Valley's Edge water, in this mega-drought, is designed to tap the deep aquifer to quench the thirst of 10,000 people, when we are already strongly advised to conserve our water.

FIRE: This land was already in three fires in the last nineteen years. Imagine a Camp Fire inferno with 10,000 more people entering Skyway with Butte Creek Canyon and Paradise residents!

THE ALTERNATIVE: We need Smart Growth development on the Opportunity sites in Downtown Chico and underutilized nearby areas, with mixed use housing, walkable wide sidewalks, tree canopies, and small electric buses with short headways.

In this manner, we can preserve our safe beautiful community-oriented hometown that we know and love, while preserving the unique land and endemic flora and fauna that weaves through it and around it. Join us! smartgrowthchico.org

Smart Growth *continued from p. 2*

population density and automobile-centric design, Longfellow would not remain walkable. Where the neighborhood once had a grocery, pharmacy, and hardware store they now have one destination fitness center.

On the flip side of expansion on the fringe came decline in the core. Following the opening of the North Valley Plaza, with its abundant parking and air-conditioned box stores, downtown business was decimated. What survived was mostly dependent on foot traffic from the university. Meanwhile, an overzealous regime of traffic engineering did its best to encourage fast car traffic through the city center. Many of the largest and most exquisite buildings, particularly hotels, were demolished and replaced with gas stations or parking lots.

In the 1970s a coalition of student leaders landed some seats on the City Council, successfully implementing a program including bike lanes, protection of prime farmland, and the reestablishment of public transportation. An era of clashing priorities in the development of Chico ensued. Sprawl was restricted to the west, but accelerated in every other direction. New development decisively privileges car traffic, but concessions are required for bicyclists and, at least in theory, for public transit.

This is the era we live in today. In the 1990's Chico adopted plans calling for a mix of housing types in all neighborhoods, and mixed-use neighborhood centers. These goals were contradicted



by the City down zoning core neighborhoods, effectively imposing a moratorium on new housing in many of the most walkable settings. More recently, the Sycamore Glen subdivision had plans for a mixture of housing types and a walkable, mixed-use center. Instead, the apartments are separated by four lanes of Eaton Road (six at a crosswalk) and the City granted a permit for a drive-thru coffee shop.

While the General Plan adopted by Chico in 2011 calls for high-density transit-oriented housing Downtown and along certain stretches of major roadways, other city policies stand in the way. Just after the Camp Fire, the City reviewed a proposal for a four-story building on the corner of Fourth and Main Streets, and insisted that no housing be built without parking. As a result the project was scaled back to a single-story restaurant with a parking lot.

The goals in Chico's plans make it clear the community has a desire for a future based on smart growth, but, on the whole, city policies are failing to produce that.

Conservation Report: More about Valley's Edge!

by Grace M. Marvin, Blue Oak Group Conservation Chair

Most of my most recent conservation activity involves working with others to prevent the Valley's Edge project from becoming reality in Butte County. It is a severely problematic housing development (as reported elsewhere in this paper). Briefly, the city plans on annexing 1446 acres of County land up against the foothills, i.e., land that now consists of old growth forests, numerous endangered species, and vernal pools—almost twice the area of Central Park in New York City. It would be SE of Chico between 20th Street and the Skyway and between Bruce and Honey Run roads. 2777 residential units are planned, and only one of its parks will be open to the public. (Does this sound like a gated community?)

There are many reasons why we object to the project, not only because of the plundering of the land but also because it is in a location frequented by fires and flooding. Just as important is that the housing that is planned will not be affordable to those needing homes in Chico. Thus, wealthy people will be lured to this area to contribute to the city's tax base but will also severely aggravate air pollution and climate change with newly added cars that they drive to the city for shopping, work, schooling, or pleasure.

Several environmental groups have joined the Sierra Club (which will pay \$15,000 to lawyers) and Smart Growth Advocates in this fight, including the California Native Plant Society, Altacal Audubon Society, Friends of Butte Creek, and Butte Environmental Council.

The Mother Lode Chapter (MLC) of the Sierra Club was able to quickly hire an environmental lawyer to respond excellently and quickly to the Draft Environmental Impact Report developed by the City of Chico last December. And now the Club, with the help of individual donors and organizations is getting ready to fund an essential legal response to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) – projected for this summer. Typically, the opponents have only 30

days to respond to the FEIR, and we want to be intellectually and financially ready.

Individuals can help by writing and/or speaking to the Chico City Council and by making (tax-deductible) donations.

We can donate via the link on the Blue Oak Facebook page or on the Smart Growth Advocates web page (<https://www.smartgrowthchico.org/>). If you are reading this online, you could click on the same link below: (https://act.sierraclub.org/donate/rc_connect_campaign_designform?id=7013q000002JXZEAA4&formcampaignid=7013q000002FvgYAAS).

It will get marked automatically for the Valley's Edge fund – no memo needed.

If you are able and willing, you could, instead, write a tax-deductible check to the SC Foundation with a memo (on bottom left of check) MLC: Valley's Edge. Please mail your donation to me, and I will note your information and forward it to the Sierra Club's Foundation Account challenging Valley's Edge. My address is Grace M. Marvin, 1621 North Cherry St., Chico, CA 95926. I will record your name and the amount of the check and then send it to the proper Sierra Club office.

p.s. Since I am the representative from the Blue Oak Group to the Mother Lode Chapter (MCL), I attend all MLC meetings. To find out more, see <https://www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode>. Here one can find out about the work of Sierra Club members on a variety of issues. Recent issues have included: forest destruction, major dam issues (such as in Oroville and the Shasta Dam), herbicides in the Tahoe Keys, removal of tobacco waste, wildfire danger, environmentally damaging housing projects, biodiversity decline, climate change, violations of CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), and much more. At one meeting, the leaders voted not only to fund the fight against Valley's Edge but also to fund trashcans for Chico's homeless, a project now headed by Betty Volker. But that's another story....

Growing Beyond the System

by Wendy McCall, ExCom Chair

The current food systems on which we all depend: our farmers, laborers, global and local connections are experiencing a collapse like dominoes falling, will have cumulative effects that will continue to wreak havoc on our food systems for years to come. The reality of this is already hitting us hard in the pocket, where skyrocketing prices are forcing many people already experiencing food insecurity into more dire situations; and many of those who may have never experienced it before, are feeling it now as well. Our dependence on food conveniently boxed and packaged in markets, our disconnection with the food that's meant to nourish us and the lands which sustain us has left many feeling hopeless as the pressure continues. We've become so dependent on large corporations which dominate the food industry, that we've forgotten that small local farmers and backyard gardens at one time fed most people and communities helping get many generations through hard times. We've forgotten that the land we stand on can also sustain us, that the Indigenous people of these lands thrived and lived off the local abundance of foods produced right here. We need to recognize and honor the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that's being shared by those who are still here and possess thousands of years of knowledge. It's time we return to connecting with one another, and developing a relationship, a reconnection with the land around us.

Butte County Local Food Network (BCLFN) a local nonprofit, partnered with our county and multiple agencies and individual leaders to help conduct the first baseline Food Security Assessment (FSA) for our area. It showed that we would only need 1500 acres to feed everyone in Butte County. The FSA showed that there are already nearly 500 acres of food grown that stays locally, we just need 1000 acres more. In response BCLFN has set out to help reach that goal by finding 1000 Acres More to grow local fresh produce which could potentially sustain a whole county.

Butte County Local Food Network has been working diligently to raise awareness of this impending food crisis, providing viable solutions, resources and connections in which the ultimate



Kids Planting a Raised Bed

goal is develop a local, resilient, regenerative and healthy food system for all. Recently I was hired by Pamm Larry, the Director of the Butte County Local Food Network to work as the Director for a new youth program BCLFN is developing called GROWN, which is an acronym for "Growing Resilient Optimism With Nature". This program is free, inclusive, exciting and fun. It connects our youth (especially at-risk students) to their food, teaches food literacy skills, gardening, wellness, and builds community connections.

The GROWN program will uplift each child's social and emotional needs, build confidence, provide employment skills, develop mentorship opportunities and create opportunities for our youth to learn about the current crises we are facing, while providing them the skills they'll need to face the challenges ahead.

I've been managing a similar program for over a

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Growing Beyond the System *continued from p. 8*

year and have stepped in to teach, over the years for the Kentfield Kids Program at Kentfield Garden, for From the Ground Up Farms, Inc., another wonderful nonprofit organization which shares BCLFN's goals. From the Ground Up is making positive changes in our communities daily, while advocating for the needs of many who are still reeling from the devastating effects of climate-fueled wildfires in our area. This program was at the heart of From the Ground Up Farm, Inc., when it was established in 2013, and I'm so honored to help keep it alive and able to now partner with BCLFN to bring our kids the GROWN program.

Families are welcome - we have something for everyone. I merge my love for arts and science into each program, creating a fun and educational time for kids, in a space where they feel safe to explore and learn to grow together. This is the first of our GROWN programs to be offered to the community. A new "Teen Group" beginning in August will meet at Vecino Victory Gardens, with more community gardens to follow.

In addition to these Community Garden programs, GROWN will begin being implemented in schools throughout Butte County, and be offered similar to how music and art classes are taught, with students managing, maintaining and enjoying the rewards from their own school gardens, while earning school credits. We worked hard through the summer along with the kids I worked with in the summer program offered through Achieve Charter School in Paradise.

Paradise, recognized as the largest town of

California's most deadly climate fueled wildfire, 2018's Camp Fire, sparked by faulty PG&E equipment, is also home to many fire survivors who are still trying to piece back together their lives. The youth on the ridge have experienced tremendous trauma, coupled with the struggles faced by the recent pandemic, yet still these kids astound me with their resilience, and inspire me to do more. I'm excited to have the opportunity to partner with Achieve Charter School, not just in Paradise where they recently have been able to finally reopen, but at the school in Chico which they established after the Camp Fire. It has since grown and become a wonderful school addition for our Chico community, and those who had to relocate to Chico as well. GROWN will also be working with Ridgeview High, whose campus was completely destroyed in the Camp Fire, as they begin their first year in their new school which will open in autumn. I am so excited to have the opportunity to work with them as they transition to their new home space.

The current food crisis we face is frightening. Climate change and catastrophic events set off by our recent pandemic is alarming. There's so much at stake, our youth and future generations are depending on us to begin moving in new directions and we have a small window of time to do so. To find out more about the Local Food Security Assessment and ways you can get active, donate, volunteer, or ways you can become a 1000 Acres More Ambassador, please visit: <https://bclocalfood.org>



Join the Blue Oak Facebook Page

The Blue Oak Group of the Sierra Club has a Facebook page where people can find information about local conservation issues and events and post items of interest. Anyone can go to the page and ask to become part of the conversation.

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