

# Woodsman, Spare Those Trees

**Nipomo's iconic oak woodlands are hanging in the balance**



Nipomo Action Committee

The Dana Reserve mega-development proposed for Nipomo poses a question, one that arises in the mind of the reader when perusing the project's Environmental Impact Report. The *Tribune* succinctly phrased that question as "What matters more, oak trees or affordable homes?" More precisely, what is worth the sacrifice of oak woodland habitat, sensitive species and air quality, and the worsening of a local "jobs/ housing imbalance" via a massive unplanned population increase?

According to the EIR, this is the answer:

"An overarching goal and vision of the project is to provide affordable-by-design housing geared towards first-time homebuyers and starter homes." This will be achieved by dedicating one of the development's ten neighborhoods—the one on the smallest amount of acreage, occupying 1.4% of the project area—to affordable housing.

The City of San Luis Obispo recently had something to say about "affordable by design" when it was revamping its affordable housing program. As reported last March by the *Tribune*, "...the current policy isn't meeting the housing demands because development incentives that encourage projects with home sizes that are so-called 'affordable by design' don't actually produce homes that are cheap enough for many lower- and moderate-income buyers."

And:

“At their market-rate prices, these ‘affordable by design’ homes are still often out of reach for many working people, even when they’re small, according to city staff and a consultant analysis.”

And:

“We can talk all we want to about trying to build affordable by design, and I have been talking about it for 20 years, but it hasn’t worked’, said Councilwoman Carlyn Christianson. ‘And so that’s why you have deed-restricted, and that’s why we’re having this discussion.... That’s the only thing that really works.’”

But even if you’re a believer in “affordable by design,” the Dana Reserve’s affordable housing would be affordable housing provided by a project that relies on a future rate of annual precipitation that is highly unlikely, while putting pressure on a water supply in a region that is already in Stage 4 drought conditions. It would be affordable housing provided by a project that, per the EIR, will mean “maximum daily operational air pollutant emissions [that] exceed [SLO Air Pollution Control District’s] operational significance thresholds.” (Lousy air quality is not a selling point for potential home buyers). It would be affordable housing provided by a project that will result in “a cumulatively considerable impact to greenhouse gas emissions,” not even including the current and future sequestered carbon lost in the destruction of 4,000 mature oak trees. It would be affordable housing provided by a project that will run counter to the “goals and policies identified within the County of San Luis Obispo General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element, Framework for Planning (Inland), [Land Use Ordinance], and South County Area Plan regarding preservation and no net loss of sensitive biological resources and preservation of rural visual character.”

The inclusion of a small percentage of allegedly affordable housing in the proposed project does not override its impacts to the environment and the economy. (Agriculture also fares poorly in the environmental analysis.) As proposed, the Dana Reserve development illustrates the reason why affordable housing should be [an outcome of public policy](#), not left up to developers, inserted into project proposals for the purpose of persuading elected officials to ignore their project's significant impacts.

The EIR includes in its analysis a scaled-back project alternative that would substantially avoid the destruction of coastal oak woodland habitat, excessive air pollutants, greenhouse gas emissions, vehicle miles traveled, and unplanned population growth (and for “affordable by design” fans, would still allow for plenty of Additional Dwelling Units, i.e. granny units and tiny homes.) It’s called the Burton Mesa chaparral avoidance alternative, which we have pointed out to the County is the only version of the project it should permit.

The screenshot shows a Change.org petition page. At the top, the Change.org logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'Start a petition', 'My petitions', 'Browse', and 'Membership' are on the right. A search icon and 'Log in' link are also present. Below the navigation is a 'Petition details' section with links for 'Comments' and 'Updates'. The main heading of the petition is 'Stop the Dana Reserve Development as Currently Designed'. Below the heading is a large image of a landscape with a blue banner that reads 'DEVELOPMENT PROJECT BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT'. To the right of the image is a progress bar showing '1,044 have signed. Let's get to 1,500!'. Below the progress bar is a green checkmark icon and text: 'At 1,500 signatures, this petition is more likely to get picked up by local news!'. Below this are two profile icons with names and timestamps: 'Irene Hayes signed 2 hours ago' and 'Jocelyn DeVault signed 2 hours ago'. At the bottom right is a sign-up form with fields for 'First name' and 'Last name'. At the bottom left of the petition area, it says 'Kelly Sleeth started this petition'.

Local residents are sounding the alarm. [Sign their petition here.](#)