

OPINION

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Building a Foundation for New School Development

by Richard A. Patterson, President
Santa Clarita Valley Facilities Foundation

With a high degree of certainty, it's possible to forecast tomorrow's weather based on today's observations. On the other hand, trying to predict the weather ten years from now is far more difficult. The likelihood of an accurate forecast diminishes as information on future conditions becomes sketchy, not to mention the unknown variables that might develop.

Now try forecasting new schools – when they will be needed and where they should be built. Not much different than forecasting the weather. It depends on the reliability of known patterns and information currently available.

In terms of student needs, school districts must decide whether existing classrooms will meet future demand and, if not, when new schools will be needed and where they should be located. It's that simple. And then again it isn't, since land is scarce and difficult to come by.

In recent years, school property in the William S. Hart Union High School District has been acquired in two different ways: developer-provided sites and those sites purchased and developed by the Santa Clarita Valley Facilities Foundation for the benefit of the district.

In a perfect world, tying land for a school site to a new home development project works just fine. In reality, delays in housing tract approvals, housing market slumps, a general economic downturn, natural disaster, or any number of other variables can stall or derail a project.

Purchasing land to build a school independent of any new home development can work even better. Makes sense, actually. Not only do independent land purchases protect the school district from unexpected fluctuations in the housing market, but they also serve as a hedge against inflation.

The Santa Clarita Valley Facilities Foundation was established in 1998 to focus on acquiring land and finding a way to build a much-needed high school at a time when school overcrowding reached crisis proportions. The Hart District Governing Board developed a concept for a public-private partnership that could get a school project off the ground, move it along quickly, while minimizing costs and maximizing state funding.

In 2004, the Facilities Foundation joined the Hart District in celebrating the opening of Golden Valley High School, which helped reduce overcrowding in other area schools. In partnership with the City of Santa Clarita the Foundation built an extension of Golden Valley Road, a key segment of the cross-valley connector, prior to school construction.

With the success of the Golden Valley project, the Facilities Foundation laid the groundwork for the cost-effective development of other school projects. For eight years now, the organization has been dedicated to locating, acquiring and developing sites for new schools in the Hart District, along with the necessary infrastructure.

Each project begins with a request from the Hart District based upon the district's projected growth and long-term strategic planning goals. Acquisition and development of school sites in this manner enables the school district to meet student population needs on the district's timetable, independent of new home developments.

The Facilities Foundation recently acquired two prospective school properties in Canyon Country. These purchases, in combination with the sale of land adjacent to Golden Valley, have strengthened the capabilities and land holdings of the Foundation in the current year, securing its work into the future.

The Facilities Foundation doesn't construct school buildings, but it does pave the way for the Hart District to build schools, supporting the district's long-term strategic plan. With hope on the horizon and as beneficiary of all Foundation assets, the Hart District and community can look forward to new schools opening during the next decade. The Facilities Foundation is proud of its role in offering viable planning options for the Hart District as it moves forward to provide the best facilities for our students.

An annual report to the community is available online at www.scv-ff.org or by calling (661) 753-5759.