



# CITY OF RIO VISTA

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July 11, 2024

James Bezek, Director of Resource Management  
County of Solano  
675 Texas Street  
Fairfield, CA 94533

Dear Mr. Bezek:

The City of Rio Vista (City) received your July 1, 2024 letter requesting City input on the anticipated impacts of the proposed initiative "Rezoning of 17,500 acres of land in East Solano to allow the Development of a New Community" (also known as "California Forever").

Given the proximity of development, the location and magnitude of the California Forever project, it has raised substantial concerns for the City and its residents. The eastern boundary of the project is approximately 2,600 feet west of the existing Rio Vista city limits and the initial phase of the project proposes a residential population five times greater than the existing City of Rio Vista.

It is not possible to fully quantify the impacts of a project of this magnitude without detailed technical studies and environmental review. The ballot measure speaks to the need for full review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City would require such analysis to fully understand the project and how the project would feasibly mitigate its impacts. Any future efforts by California Forever to proceed with less than full analysis under CEQA would be strongly opposed by the City and we fully intend to review, comment, and participate in the CEQA process as a Responsible Agency. In the meantime, we foresee the following impacts that should be seriously considered:

Traffic and circulation impacts of California Forever present significant concerns for the City. Highway 12 provides regional circulation for commercial and commuter trips generally between Lodi and Fairfield. This traffic already impacts circulation in the City and, even without California Forever, represents a very challenging problem that can only be improved through coordinated efforts of regional and state agencies. The additional traffic congestion associated with California Forever could overwhelm Highway 12 and local streets within Rio Vista, creating regular gridlock within Rio Vista that would present both quality of life and safety impacts to our residents. Adding additional traffic trips without expansion of Highway 12, new infrastructure, new roads, and additional ingress/egress could be a deathtrap for current and future residents of the region if ever an emergency transpired. Furthermore, traffic impacts from the project alone must be considered in the context of cumulative impacts. The City of Rio Vista is in the process of updating its General Plan and Waterfront Specific Plan. The California Forever initiative must take those land use plans and development projections into account. We are concerned the construction of housing units to support a population of 400,000 will exacerbate already oversaturated conditions of Highway 12, Church Road, Main Street in Rio Vista, and other collector streets that connect our City to adjacent properties to the California Forever project. Additionally, there needs to be ample pedestrian and bicycle facilities that provide connectivity, as well as mass transit that will not burden the City's usage of Delta Breeze.

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The proposed California Forever project purports to establish a "beach" or "lagoon" that will draw "thousands" of patrons county-wide. This regional attraction must account for the traffic impacts from each of the seven cities in Solano County, along with the residents in the unincorporated county, and others outside of the County. Promotional materials liken this lagoon to a Disneyesque feature, and if advertised as such, then roads and infrastructure, will not be able to support such amenity. Of course, for any recreational amenity such as, sufficient parking must also be planned for and provided. So far, there is no information demonstrating where this lagoon would be located, how transportation impacts would be mitigated, where a parking structure would be constructed, and how the freeway would be connected to it without impacting other jurisdictions.

Rio Vista enjoys a stable groundwater supply and careful monitoring of groundwater indicates our water supplies will be adequate to serve the needs of the community as it grows. The City does not have any meaningful information on the source of water supply to serve California Forever and we are concerned the project could impact Rio Vista, if it relies in whole or in part on groundwater resources. At this stage, California Forever purports to have water to serve 100,000 of its future potential residents, but there is no information as to how this water would be delivered to the project site and how the balance of the residents will be served or where this water is coming from, other than "outside of Solano County". To be clear, California law demands that development show near term and long-term water supply analysis, how that long-term demand is likely to be met with those water sources, the environmental impacts of exploiting those water sources (onsite and offsite), and how those impacts are to be mitigated. We have not seen any analysis answering those questions. We have also not seen any analysis demonstrating that the Solano subbasin will not be impacted. A statement by California Forever that "it will not be using water from Solano Irrigation District/Lake Berryessa" is not enough. We need proof of the actual source of water. The impacts of sourcing water offsite must also be mitigated, along with decommissioning almond orchards to procure their water rights for this development.

The construction of the lagoon would separately need at least 20-acre feet of water annually. With water evaporation, cleaning, landscaping, irrigation, this would likely increase to at least 30-acre feet of water. Yet, the proposed project has not demonstrated how it would source this water, clean the lagoon in a safe way to humans and the environment, and not pollute the existing Solano Subbasin water supply or stormwater basin.

Further, the construction of residential units to support a population of 400,000, new commercial and retail, and a new lagoon still does not contemplate the necessity of water for fire response. Situating new uses and an increased population with no water for fire resources will expose all to extreme risk.

Rio Vista is a relatively small city and enjoys a diverse collection of retail and commercial businesses that serve our residents and is actively working on economic development opportunities. The City has concerns that large format commercial located close to the City could draw Rio Vista residents and compete with the City's opportunities for commercial and retail, resulting in negative socio-economic impacts on the existing businesses in Rio Vista and its historic downtown commercial district. The City is also concerned the newly announced California Forever lagoon will detract visitors from Rio Vista shops and restaurants further causing negative socio-economic impacts.

The Rio Vista Fire Department serves the life safety needs of the community as well as providing assistance to surrounding communities through mutual aid agreements. If California Forever proceeds, given the close proximity of the Rio Vista Fire Department it is likely mutual aid agreements for responding to significant events would be discussed between the City, the County and California Forever. Under such a scenario, it would be important to ensure the

resources of the Rio Vista Fire Department remain adequate to serve the needs of the Rio Vista community. Evacuation plans should be identified from a fire and traffic perspective.

Among the challenges of creating a new community of this magnitude is providing the various public facilities, services and community amenities required to serve the new population during initial phases of development. It is a common challenge in large greenfield developments to provide schools, parks, commercial and all the supporting land uses in a timely manner. Often such facilities lag ten years or more behind the construction of the first new homes. Given the proximity of Rio Vista, it would be reasonable to assume increased burdens on City facilities as the California Forever project proceeds through the first phases of development. While California Forever has presented ambitious plans, the realities of planning, infrastructure construction and development of community amenities are challenging and time consuming and the interim impacts of underserved development are a concern for the City of Rio Vista.

It is unknown how agricultural economic losses as a result of the proposed project precisely and directly impacts the city of Rio Vista itself, but the City is concerned globally over impacts to agriculture in East Solano County and the almond orchards that will certainly cease to exist once their water supplies have been cut off and diverted to this project, wherever they may be. Agriculture and the open space surrounding Rio Vista are fundamental to the history and character of Rio Vista and numerous businesses in Rio Vista support regional agricultural land uses. There is no question there will be significant conversion of farmland, along with impacts to viewsheds, habitat, and likely cultural and tribal cultural resources. The conversion of agricultural and open space lands near Rio Vista will alter the character of our community. Additionally, the interface of urban and rural lands present challenges that must be addressed in the land development process to reduce the potential use incompatibilities. Buffers must be established, including within the airport in the City, and ensuring compliance with the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan.

The proposed initiative includes 10 "voter guarantees" that would address various concerns of the City and provide various benefits to the residents of Solano County. While the City appreciates the inclusion of these provisions, we question how the requirements will become legally enforceable. The enforcement of these provisions will be the responsibility of the County and the City will advocate for these measures through the public review and CEQA processes of the project should the voters of Solano County approve the California Forever project. Similarly, how would a development agreement, which is by definition a voluntary agreement, be legally enforceable if one or both parties cannot agree on the terms?

A development project of this magnitude will have, in addition to the above, impacts such as aesthetics, noise, air quality, and contribute to overall growth inducing cumulative impacts. This should be done, in part, by analyzing California Forever's proposed project with each of the seven jurisdiction's certified housing elements. Those documents should identify projects each city reasonably foresees will be developed over the course of the next eight years. That will provide an initial baseline of cumulative impacts.

The success of this project cannot be on the backs of cities like Rio Vista. Rio Vista cannot absorb, pay for, contribute to, or mitigate California Forever's project in any way. The City of Rio Vista appreciates the opportunity to identify these initial concerns related to the California Forever project. As noted, detailed analysis of these and other impacts will require the technical analysis that is typically completed in a CEQA review. Please feel free to reach out if you wish to discuss the City's concerns related to California Forever.

Regards,

  
Kristina Miller, City Manager  
City of Rio Vista

