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Hemphill: The push and pull of development

By Alan Hemphill

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Has it ever entered your thought process that most people who oppose development live in homes, condos, apartments or mobile homes that a developer built?

How about the fact that anyone who opposes the destruction of native habitat actually destroyed native habitat when their home was built? I never see them tearing down their house to provide more native habitat.

There is always more than enough posturing by people in almost every phase of life that talk the talk but can't walk the walk, but those who reflexively oppose development are in a world of their own.

I don't much care for development — and that is why I have moved twice. We moved once from a tract home in Clairemont that was bought in the 1950s when Balboa Avenue was a dirt road, and from north Poway when traffic again overwhelmed us. We now live in a tiny North County enclave of 1,500 homes and no stop lights.

When we do not like our surroundings, we have the option of leaving — and we do. We don't want to control others, but we can control ourselves.

Development always involves a push and a pull — a push by developers and a pull back by neighbors. In the end, money usually wins. Not just money for developers, but money in permits for continued government expenses and development "off-site" road building that helps cash-strapped governments try to catch up with traffic.

NIMBYism seems to be a genetic disorder for some people.

Many years ago I was a constant follower of the Poway Unified School District School board politics. One night I was in the audience when candidates for the board squared off to debate. One candidate was particularly effusive about how the traffic, school overcrowding and massive development were the causes of concern that drove him to run for the board.

Since I was very familiar with all of the other candidates, but not the speaker, I asked him how long he had lived in the district. He replied, "Three months."

It seemed to many of us that he was a recent addition to the traffic, and his children were an addition to the school overcrowding. I am sure he did not see the irony of his position, but the laughter indicated that many did see the irony.

Almost all of us are living in homes that were opposed by the neighbors, and

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on land that was once "pristine." This does not seem to register in our minds.

Many years ago, when I was president of the Green Valley Civic Association, the subject of a proposed development, Vineland Hills, came before the GVCA Board. I was the only vote opposed to expressing the opposition of GVCA to that development. I told the other board members, "Some day that development will be a part of GVCA." It is.

Of course there is good development, and bad development, but few people actually examine the specific details — they just have a visceral reaction to having neighbors where there once was open space. People believe that there is a visual prescriptive easement — if they have viewed that undeveloped hill for x years they must be able to view it forever.

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