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Guest Commentary: El Dorado Hills CSD keeps green in mind while planning

By Wayne Lowery -

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Study after study has shown that economic, social and environmental health comes to those communities that implement planned growth in parks and recreational development.

For communities such as El Dorado Hills, which is rife with open space, the drive to expand parks and preserve habitat is expected to transform the community for residents, businesses, and developers alike.

For 45 years, the El Dorado Hills Community Services District has been one of the few public agencies in the nation to consistently keep a green mind in all aspects of planning. The CSD continues to build partnerships and explore alternative methods of funding to manage 29 parks, a myriad of recreational facilities and considerable open space.

A partnership between Lennar and AKT Properties, West Valley LLC, has allocated 30 percent naturalized open space to preserve oak woodlands and creeks running through the Blackstone development south of Highway 50. Don Barnett, senior community planning manager for Lennar, said that within any masterplanned community, Lennar wants to provide the amenities and facilities that residents need and want, such as recreational parks, open space, trail systems, and land for schools, community centers and libraries. Because trails, parks and playgrounds are among the five most important community amenities when selecting a home, a solid park infrastructure is key to a solid local economy. A study by the Wharton School of Economics points to an average 25 percent increase in property values in neighborhoods with greenbelts, parks and recreational facilities.

Master-planned communities with consistent CC&R enforcement maintain their pricing levels even during downturns.

Benefits aside, parks like these can be expensive. Because affordable programs are important to parks and recreation departments, alternative funding sources as well as volunteer resources are increasingly needed. Mike McDougall of AKT Development said by using park impact fees, his company is able to build parks before it begins building homes. In large part because of AKT's successful partnership with the CSD, McDougall said the company has modified its corporate philosophy about integrating open space, trails and passive open-space areas.

Achieving a balance between business and housing is spawning additional partnerships throughout the private sector.

Target, one of the newest entrants in the rapid commercial growth in El Dorado Hills, is bringing a long-standing commitment to public-private sector partnerships.

According to store manager and El Dorado Hills resident Brad Scott, Target's unwavering commitment to corporate citizenship dates back to 1962 - the same year that marked the birth of the El Dorado Hills CSD.

He said Target dedicates 5 percent of net income to the communities in which Target does business, through local grants and special programs. Scott said this translates to about \$3 million per week, and last year team members donated 315,000 volunteer hours, many of them in park development, maintenance and renovation of playgrounds. He said Target is looking forward to exploring ways in which it can continue this legacy of support in El Dorado Hills.

Businesses, residents and community agencies agree that funding will come for the parks. By sharing a common vision for maximizing development potential and a common commitment to fulfilling

community expectations and needs, innovative solutions from 21st century partnerships are well on the way to becoming a reality.

Wayne Lowery is the general manager of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District.

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