



## American Canyon annexes site for Town Center

JAMES NOONAN | Posted: Wednesday, December 8, 2010 12:00 am

The city of American Canyon is growing by nearly 300 acres that will support the city's dreams of a Town Center project.

The Napa Local Agency Formation Commission voted unanimously Monday to approve the annexation. The city can now move forward with the project designed to become the "social and economic center" of American Canyon, said LAFCO Executive Officer Keene Simonds.

The project — which could see more than 1,600 single- and multi-family homes being build in the area east of Highway 29 and south of Watson Lane — has been a topic of discussion for years in the county's southernmost city.

During the October meeting in which it voted to submit an annexation application to LAFCO, the American Canyon City Council enthusiastically supported the project, voting unanimously to move ahead.

Brent Cooper, planning director for American Canyon, said that with the annexation approved, the city can begin the planning process and move forward with the selection of a developer.

Oakland-based McGrath Properties Inc. previously said it would submit a development plan once the annexation process was complete, something Cooper now expects to play out.

Cooper said the 1,600-home figure was the upper limit of what would be allowed in the Town Center project, and that the final number would be the result of a "careful planning process" by the city.

Napa County Supervisor Keith Caldwell, whose District 5 includes American Canyon, said the annexation was a victory for city and the county alike.

"I think it's good for both parties," Caldwell said. "It's a win-win situation for everyone involved."

In addition to satisfying the need for a long-awaited "downtown" area in the community, Caldwell expects the Town Center project to help resolve local and regional transportation issues through key roadway improvements, including the extension of Newell Drive.

"From a planning perspective, it's going to be a very 'smart community' kind of development," he said.

The type of smart growth illustrated in the Town Center plan helps restrict development to the incorporated portions of the county, thus preserving the rural character of the unincorporated areas, Caldwell said.

Also of benefit to the county is that American Canyon has agreed to absorb 368 units from the county's affordable housing requirements as part of the tax sharing agreement reached between the city and county last May.

Under state law, all jurisdictions are required to have land zoned to provide housing for all income levels, meeting what is known as a Regional Housing Needs Assessment.

Napa County has an affordable housing unit assignment of 651 units, and has previously been sued for allegedly not providing enough low-income housing to satisfy this requirement.

The agreement between American Canyon and the county will see 200 affordable or moderately priced units go up between 2014 and 2022 and an additional 168 after 2022.

While the project was supported by all in attendance, the idea that the annexation would pose certain challenges was not ignored.

The LAFCO report noted that the American Canyon water supply is “a bit precarious,” Lewis Chilton, LAFCO commissioner and Yountville Town Councilman, pointed out during the annexation discussion. “I think this commission needs to be sure it’s making responsible decisions.”

American Canyon — which has struggled with water demands through dry years in the past — will be responsible for providing water to the nine parcels that make up the newly annexed territory.

The city supplies water to two of the nine parcels, with the remaining seven either without water service or having established groundwater wells.

Ultimately, the commission agreed that the water issue was best left to be resolved by the city of American Canyon, noting that it would have the final say on what the project would look like.

For Caldwell, this display of trust in the city he grew up in is a refreshing change from what has been seen in years past.

“People used to question what was the intent of American Canyon,” Caldwell said, adding there was a fear that the city would “annex and pave over everything south of Napa.”

With the recent annexation, Caldwell said the county’s fastest growing city is being viewed in a different light.

“It’s added some credibility to American Canyon as a political entity,” he said. “There’s more of a comfort level now.”