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GUEST OPINION

‘Farm-To-Table’ Community Concept Good For Douglas County

by Joan E. Neuffer

The recent approval of the Farmstead at Corley Ranch has been the subject of much controversy, generating several news articles and personal letters from the residents of Douglas County.

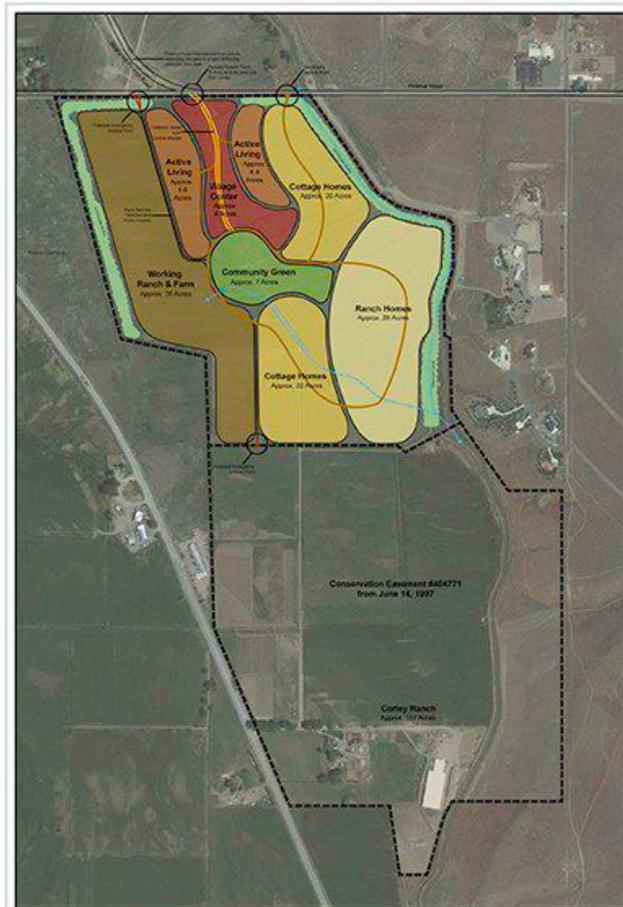
In reality, the Farmstead project is vastly different than other mixed-use/residential real estate developments in

our area. Farmstead is truly unique because it incorporates a “farm-to-table” concept and lifestyle and will be the first of its kind in Nevada.

The Farmstead vision began taking shape nearly three years ago when Jon and Paula Corley engaged Mark Neuffer of Alta Consulting to create a working concept, design and long-term plan, and to present it to Douglas County.

Mark and his team approached the challenge to find “the right place to build, and the right place to preserve” on the heels of one of the worst economic recessions in our state’s history.

On March 3, 2016, the Board of County Commissioners approved a Master Plan Amendment and a Specific Plan for the Farmstead. ¹



PROJECT COMPONENTS

- Village Center with mixed use commercial, live-work lofts and artisan studios.
- Healthy living with proximity to fresh food and walkable streets and trails.
- Central Community Green with Iconic Barn, orchard and community gardens/greenhouses.
- Irrigation channel and trail connection to community.

LEGEND

	Village Center: Mixed Use Commercial, Lodging Live-work Studios Lofts		Residential Connector
	Community Green: Iconic Barn, Orchard, Community Garden and Greenhouses		Local Street
	Active Living: Approx. 40 Units 4 DU per Acre		Farm Access Road
	Cottage Homes: Approx. 145 SFR 3.4 DU per Acre		Gated Emergency Access
	Ranch Homes: Approx. 65 SFR 2.3 DU per Acre		
	Working Ranch & Farm		



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FARMSTEAD AT CORLEY RANCH SITE PLAN
DOUGLAS COUNTY, NEVADA
ALTA CONSULTING, LTD.
JULY 10, 2015

At the conclusion of a lengthy hearing, four of the five board members agreed that the plan met the legal standard for approval under Douglas County Code and applicable state law. ²

The Board members individually articulated their findings supporting the project for the record.

The Farmstead community includes 250 homes centered around a working, sustainable farm and orchard. Many other states have embraced the idea, and several successful farm-to-table communities operate in the United States. ³

Indeed, the farm-to-table approach to the development of residential real estate has become what can be described as a national movement. ⁴

In Douglas County, residential development is controlled through a permit allocation system. This system is designed to provide for strategic growth, while at the

same time, maintaining our rural character.

As evidenced by their votes, a majority of Board members believe moving forward with the Farmstead is good for our community.

In my view, the Farmstead project, while contemplating growth, provides for wise use of our natural resources and benefits the general community.

Positive Impact for People

Individual farmers and ranchers in Douglas County can sell their agricultural land consistent with the Master Plan, but their conservation choices must also be economically feasible. Finding a middle ground between ranching, development, and property rights benefits the community as a whole. The Farmstead project allows the Corley family to sell a portion of their agricultural land, yet continue to live on and

maintain their ranching and farming operations in existence since 1996.

Douglas County has a growing retirement-age community. Building the Farmstead addresses the need for quality housing for our active adults, aged 55 and over. ⁵ Recently, an article in The Record-Courier referenced the U.S. Census numbers for March 2016, indicating Douglas County's overall population has in fact increased over the past three years. ⁶

The farm-to-table concept and community park-like setting provides a more natural, agricultural environment that promotes an active, healthy lifestyle for Douglas County residents. Walking paths and a community barn will facilitate social interaction and help build family relationships.

The community farm located within the project will be

professionally maintained to provide fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables for the residents, and possibly for the public, i.e., farmers market, community-supported agriculture (CSA) gardens, etc. For example, the owners of Agritopia, a farm-to-table community located in Gilbert, Arizona, designated several acres for the public to purchase small garden plots to raise their own vegetables and herbs. ⁷ Agritopia also offers a college-level internship program for agriculture students.

Good for the Environment

A portion of the land within the Farmstead is preserved in perpetuity through a conservation easement agreement created under state law. ⁸ This conservation easement is in addition to the existing conservation easement established on the Corley land in 1997. Lands within conservation easements are essentially protected from future development. ⁹

The Farmstead utilizes the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program approved by the Board and codified in DCC Section 20.500 et. seq. In exchange for the rights to develop the Farmstead (receiving area), approximately 160 acres of environmentally sensitive land (sending area) in Douglas County will be preserved as open space. In this case, a portion of the Stodieck Farm land will serve as the sending area. ¹⁰

The Right Location

As recognized by the Board members, the construction of the Washoe Tribe Travel Plaza has altered the land use equation and weighs in favor of approving the Farmstead.

Water necessary for the

development and residential use is already available and will be supplied by the Gardnerville Water Company (GWC). Contrary to the claims of some individuals, the water for Farmstead will not be drawn from the aquifer serving the Ruhenstroth neighborhood. According to the GWC Engineer, the water production from the GWC wells "does not affect the recharge of domestic wells located on the east side of the Carson Valley including Ruhenstroth."¹¹

Pinenut Road bordering on the north end of Farmstead is already available. According to the traffic studies submitted and considered by both the Planning Commission and the Board, the existing roadway can adequately accommodate the anticipated traffic flow over the next 20 years. ¹²

The residents of Farmstead will be in close proximity to the Carson Valley Hospital, the Community and Senior Center, restaurants, schools and shopping centers. Carson Valley Hospital also supported the project, reasoning that a "community within a community" would enable health care providers and first responders to address their needs "without the traditional barriers of distance and access."¹³

Built-In Controls and Limitations

The County required that in addition to the application for a Master Plan

Amendment, a separate Specific Plan be submitted outlining in careful detail how the Farmstead would be built. The County also required two separate community meetings to gather information and input from the residents of Ruhenstroth. These additional

steps were not required under the code; ¹⁴ however, the extra effort produced valuable information and an additional layer of oversight and control over the entire planning process.

The Farmstead is strictly limited to 250 homes. The project land borders two conservation easements, an existing roadway (Pinenut Road) and the Washoe Travel Plaza. The builders of Farmstead must follow the Specific Plan, which is a binding document reviewable by the Board.

Summary

The Farmstead vision is a unique combination of residential and agricultural design and uses in a near-perfect natural setting. The Farmstead community will promote sustainability, preservation of the environment, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Change, in this case, is a good thing.

According to Mark Neuffer, Farmstead's primary champion, "Corley Ranch is the right place to build – Stodieck Farm is the right place to preserve."

In my opinion, building the Farmstead is another opportunity for Douglas County to demonstrate responsible, strategic growth, build the local economy and embrace positive change. Community support is vital to its success.

To learn more about the Farmstead, go to www.farmsteadatcorleyranch.com

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 - The Board of County Commissioners is an elected board that has final decision-making authority to regulate and restrict the improvement of the land in Douglas County. See NRS 278.020(2).
- 2 - See *County of Clark v. Doumani*, 114 Nev. 46, 952 P.2s 13 (1998), (board's findings must be supported by substantial evidence).
- 3 - Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Vermont, Idaho, Hawaii, Colorado, Virginia, Washington, Texas, California, Kansas and others.
- 4 - Related articles: *The Blossoming Health And Academic Benefits of School Gardens*, C. Storrs, Sept. 2015; *Living Near Nature Linked to Longer Lives*, Study Says, M. Manella, April 2016
- 5 - In his letter for the hearing dated Feb. 29, 2016, Realtor Dick McCole stated, "There is also a significant demand for Senior Housing as it relates to a 55 years and older Active Adult Community."
- 6 - *Census Estimates Douglas Growing*, The Record-Courier, March 24, 2016
- 7 - <http://archive.azcentral.com/community/gilbert/articles/2010/08/18/20100818gilbert-agritopia-garden.html>
- 8 - Nevada Revised Statutes, Easements for Conservation, Chapter 111.390-111.140
- 9 - Nevada Revised Statutes 111.4.10.
- 10 - See Letter of Intent to sell Transfer Development Rights from Stodieck Farm, dated Feb. 28, 2016.
- 11 - See Proposed Water Service to The Farmstead at Corley Ranch, GWC Engineer Mark Gonzales, submitted Feb. 29, 2016.
- 12 - See Traffic Impact Study, Dec. 1, 2014, Traffic Works, LLC.
- 13 - See letter of support from Shannon Albert, Director of Development, Carson Valley Medical Center, dated March 1, 2016.
- 14 - DCC 20.612.010 (Specific Plan required for any development of 160 acres).