

*This opinion, by Kristine Thalman,
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The Orange Grove: Now's not the time to stop building More people will live here in the future, and they will need housing By Kristine Thalman

California will gain 7 million to 11 million new residents by 2025, increasing the state's population from 37 million today to as many as 48 million. This surge is due to natural increases (the excess of births over deaths) and immigration, according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

It is naive and irresponsible to not plan for our incoming population. The threat of anti-growth policies often fueled by NIMBYs (not in my back yard) or environmental zealots may prove to be the greatest hazard to homeownership in Southern California. Ironically, most of the NIMBYs and no-growth activists often own homes in recently developed communities that might be nearly identical to those they seek to prevent elsewhere.

Developers and residential homebuilders are consistently working with local and state government to provide the most efficient, environmentally sensitive, safe and aesthetically pleasing homes possible, and it isn't easy.

In order to get projects approved at the local level, developers provide additional services to accommodate their buyers. Interestingly, the numerous benefits associated with new home developments stand to enhance the quality of life for the community at large. These important but often overlooked enhancements include permanent open space, building schools, parks and recreational facilities, building fire stations or purchasing fire safety equipment, financing traffic improvements and enriching the city's infrastructure. These upgrades benefit the entire community and surrounding vicinities.

Heavy regulatory costs ranging from traffic impact to parks, library and school fees contribute to the high cost of homes.

With less buildable land available, builders here are getting creative and innovative. New developments are strategically built close to centers of employment, entertainment and mass transit to reduce impact on local infrastructure. The arrival of high-rise communities is redefining neighborhoods.

Orange County has been a thriving economic center that continues to be the driving financial engine for Southern California. There was a time when local business relied upon agriculture;

rich soils sustained the way of life. Today, national and multinational corporations are headquartered here, providing thousands of jobs and regional economic growth.

Those who slam the door on progress are doing a great disservice to future generations. All this economic success is threatened by the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to house our workforce.

Those who own a home in California understand the importance of homeownership as a fundamental foundation for their family. Many of those striving for homeownership find it to be a frustrating and difficult process because of the overwhelming costs and numerous hurdles. The problem of home affordability is exacerbated by the NIMBY mentality of individuals who "have theirs" and seek to deny others the same opportunity. It seems that some established residents would seek to slam the door on new developments and the families who wish to be a part of their communities.

The most daunting hurdle standing in the way of the housing crisis is the unjustified stigma associated with new home developments. Purchasing a new home has been the single most effective and rewarding investment a family can make. It is our collective responsibility to promote homeownership and encourage local government authorities to relax regulation and streamline the development process. Additionally, we must educate anti-growth activists and help them understand the critical housing needs in Southern California.

Our industry looks at the best way to utilize the land while still preserving the essence of why we continue to call "the O.C." home. The smart, efficient and collaborative efforts of homebuilding are needed now more than ever. Members of the building industry work to make Orange County communities the most beautiful, safe and economically viable for Southern California current and future residents.

If you own a home in Orange County, ask yourself whether that would have been possible in the face of the kind of NIMBY attitudes common today. We must plan for the future.