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Long-Term Effects of casino growth Deserve Complete Mitigation

**By Matt Rexroad
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Like many Woodland residents, I've come to value the partnership our local government has enjoyed with the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians. The Tribe's contributions to our community are many: job generation, economic growth, charitable support and a willingness to share the cost of the casino's impact on county resources.

More than anything else, the Tribal-County relationship has exemplified how local and sovereign tribal governments can share common goals and visions concerning long-term growth.

But recently, negotiations collapsed between the Tribe and the County over the Tribe's plans to mitigate impacts from tripling the size of the Cache Creek Casino Resort, as outlined in a Tribal Environmental Impact Report, or TEIR. Now the issue is headed for arbitration. This legal process has more in common with a civil lawsuit than working out differences within a partnership. This is unfortunate.

But in the long-run, this has nothing to do with business, much less money. The County and Tribe are virtually in agreement on monetary reimbursement for increased demand on local government. Money isn't the issue here. The issue is practicing good planning principles and performing adequate due diligence.

So what led us to this point?

First, regardless of what anyone thinks of the expansion the Tribe is completely within its sovereign rights to pursue growing Cache Creek as it sees fit. I believe in tribal sovereignty and have a voting record that demonstrates that. The real issue is the depth of its commitment to reducing impacts from the expansion as much as possible. And a key impact will be on traffic in the Capay Valley. To understand this, consider just a few elements in the expansion itself:

- A 10-story hotel and parking garage;
- 62,500 square-feet of event/convention center space;
- 467 new guest rooms in addition to the 200 that are there now;
- 27 guest casitas; and
- An increase in gaming floor space by 23,000 square-foot to accommodate more than 5,000 slot machines.

Some will point to my belief that this is a sovereign nation and argue that they should be allowed to do anything they want on trust land. I would tend to agree with that if this expansion was limited to tribal trust land. This project however, goes beyond the boundaries of trust land. The expansion includes utilization of the "Elden Property" for temporary parking, a wastewater detention reservoir and placement of excess fill (280,000 cubic yards) generated by the projects construction. The use of this property needs to be treated like any other landowner that seeks to develop their land.

The real effect of this enormous expansion is traffic. There are many other impacts but traffic is the primary consideration as thousands of people drive from urban areas to the Capay Valley for entertainment. The TEIR's estimates the increase in traffic pencils out to just 37 percent more vehicles compared to 71 percent from a County study. It is unreasonable to expect 467 rooms, 27 casitas, and the potential of 5,000 slot machines to generate just a 37 percent increase in traffic. It is my view that even the number proposed by the county expert is low.

The TEIR is unrealistic given the sheer scope of the expansion. As for a solution? Essentially the TEIR suggests that we wait for CalTrans to take the lead. That's still less realistic than the TEIR's traffic estimate, especially given that the state budget crisis is literally growing worse by the day. It could take years for CalTrans to initiate traffic improvements — *after the expansion is completed*.

Under the TEIR, mitigation proposals adopt a purely financial remedy for any and all impacts. But overcoming the cumulative effects of this massive expansion far outweighs the power of money alone to address a bigger picture. It's not about more money. It's not even about more jobs. It is about what reasonable steps can be taken to deal with the impacts of a massive expansion of activity in a valley that is not situated for that activity.

I firmly believe that the position taken unanimously by the Yolo County Board of Supervisors is consistent with the views of the people of Woodland and the Capay Valley.

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