

Monterey County 2020

The vision for the future includes a lot of new houses, but not for the people who live here.

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Photos: Jane Morba

Every now and then, you can glimpse a piece of the future here in Monterey County. Maybe it's a scale model of a thousand homes and a business park that gobbles up acres and acres of land. Or a mention at a public hearing about the pipes and dams that will mean more water. Maybe it's the real thing, manifest in the spread of big, expensive new homes rising from the sand where army houses sat rotting for a decade. Sometimes you can even hear the future already, like the traffic report from a recent Friday afternoon that came over the air about a quarter past five:

"Right now travel time from Monterey to Salinas is 45 minutes to an hour," said a public radio news announcer last week, describing the 20-mile section of Highway 68, which can be stop-and-go most every day.

Someday, that trip could take even longer. A lot longer.

In the year 2020, 15 years from now, we will have 127,000 more neighbors if all goes to plan. According to forecasts for population, housing and employment—recently completed by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG)—the tally of county residents will grow from a current headcount of 401,000 to 527,000 by 2020. In 2030, the county will be populated by more than 600,000 people. More than 50,000 new homes must be built between now and then, according to the AMBAG projections.

But where? Monterey, Carmel and Pacific Grove are pretty much built out. Marina and Seaside are

scheduled to gain thousands of people because of planned developments on Fort Ord and other adjacent lands. Cities in the Salinas Valley are expected to grow by the tens of thousands.

So who will hire all these people? The local economy's two reliable engines—hospitality and agriculture—do not generally pay enough to allow their employees to buy houses. And there are no designs for a new rocket parts factory in Ryan Ranch anytime soon.

So will the thousands of new residents expected to buy homes in Fort Ord be trust fund kids who can afford to mountain bike all day? Will they be second home buyers who don't need to find work here, just a foursome and a tee time?

Economic development so far has been a tough nut to crack. Even attempts to lure business by providing ready-made infrastructure—such as at the University of California's Monterey Bay Education, Science and Technology Center (UC-MBEST)—have failed to bring in substantial employers. As one local official put it, "The market for job creation is very thin right now."

Still, the houses will be built. And a traffic jam on Highway 68 that makes a 20-minute drive take an hour today could be just a hint of life here in the not-so-distant future.

Big Numbers

Add up the number of homes and square footage of stores, business parks and hotels among all the disparate plans currently in play and behold a brave new world. The amount of development in the pipeline for the cities and unincorporated areas of Monterey County staggers the senses and explains how the population could increase by half.

While no one would argue that an abandoned army base like Fort Ord should remain a toxic ghost town until it crumbles to dust, the huge wave of development coming there alone will hit with profound effect. Anyone who has driven down Highway 1 lately has seen the controversial Seaside Highlands development rapidly consume the hillside across from Seaside High School. When fully built it will have 380 homes. Compared to what's coming, Seaside Highlands will look dainty.

Here's a catalog of development in the pipeline:

- A project in the unincorporated area of the county will put 1,470 homes in a corner of Fort Ord called East Garrison. That's just the first major phase, comprised of three stages. Conditions permitting, subsequent phases will add another 1,200 homes. In addition to the houses, the plan calls for a downtown and an art colony, thereby creating a whole new community in an abandoned training area that's currently inhabited by bobcats, deer and wild turkey.
- The city of Marina has approved plans for a developer to build 1,050 homes in a project called Marina Heights. It's set to go into an abandoned residential section of Fort Ord that looks today like a neutron

bomb blew up there in 1994.

- Marina also has plans for 750 units of senior housing known as Cypress Knolls. It's set to be built in a likewise vacated subdivision adjacent to Marina Heights.
- One of the most ambitious plans on the coast of California, the University Villages project will put 1,237 townhouses and apartments in the space along Highway 1 between CSU-Monterey Bay and Marina where old barracks and warehouses now stand empty. In addition to the housing there will be two hotels with a total of 500 rooms, a 700,000-square foot business park and a 750,000-square foot regional shopping mall. This plan faces a brewing conflict with the Marina Heights project over water allocation. According to its developers, the project is being marketed nationally for knowledge-based industry to balance its homes with jobs.
- On the other side of Marina there's a project slated for the Armstrong Ranch known as Marina Station. That's a plan for 1,800 homes set up in the vaunted New Urban design of pedestrian-friendly streets and neighborhoods, where sidewalks and front porches enable people to speak to one another. It will be divided into three "neighborhoods" and could include a million-square-foot office park. Housing types will range from apartments to townhouses to single homes to large homes.
- The military will be replacing its existing housing on the Ord Military Community property, on the Presidio and off Aquajito Road in Monterey, under a program called the Residential Community Initiative. The plan is to build or upgrade existing housing to the tune of 8,000 housing units.
- Cal State-Monterey Bay (CSUMB) has plans to expand dramatically. Growing from a current enrollment of 3,945 students, the university's master plan expects a student body of 7,530 by 2015 and a whopping 12,000 students by 2025. Although about 3,500 will likely be students learning over the Internet, faculty and staff is expected to grow from 668 today to 2,121 by 2025. Plans for housing expected students and faculty have not been ironed out yet.
- A state park is planned for the area of dunes near Marina. Once the land is transferred from the Army—and if the project can find funding—the beach area will be spruced up with three day-use parking areas off Highway 1, and a campground with 110 camping sites.
- Seaside has plans to convert the Bayonet/Black Horse golf courses into an exclusive resort, including a Pebble Beach-style lodge with 330 rooms, 125 single-family homes and 170 time-share units with gated entrances. In Seaside.
- Seaside also has designs on a regional shopping center of its own near the main gate entrance of Fort Ord. Current plans are for a commercial center larger than the Sand City complex. If the economy will bear what borders on saturation, that would put four large shopping malls (Del Monte Center, Sand City, Seaside and University Villages) along a relatively short stretch of coast. Lacking any regional restrictions, all cities are motivated to bring in large-scale retail because it means sorely needed sales tax

revenue. But how many Targets do we need?

- Del Rey Oaks would also like to get in on the action and has planned for its own golf resort on the former Fort Ord.

That's just what's planned in and around Fort Ord. Much is planned for other parts of the county:

- Off the Peninsula but geographically close to the burgeoning city of Marina, the proposed Rancho San Juan development, south of Prunedale, would itself bring 13,000 people in 20 years, living in 4,000 homes near a two million-square foot business park and 373,000 square feet of retail space. And a golf course. That project now faces multiple lawsuits.
- The September Ranch in Carmel Valley is a plan for 95 market rate homes and 15 inclusionary units.
- Rancho Canada plans for 280 homes in Carmel Valley.
- Rancho San Carlos plans to divide 1,286 acres into 29 very exclusive properties above Carmel Valley.
- Pebble Beach has major plans for the Del Monte Forest, although it does not spell massive housing increases in the most exclusive corner of the county. The Company wants to add 160 hotel rooms, a new golf course, 33 homes and 60 units for the staff. Thousands of trees will be chopped down.

This doesn't count smaller individual projects scattered around the county, or some large developments in the South County cities like Gonzales, Greenfield, and Soledad. Each of these cities forecasts their populations to explode in the next 25 years. Gonzales is projected to grow from 7,525 in 2000 to 29,145 in 2030, Greenfield from 12,583 to 29,854 and Soledad from 22,634 to 51,634.

Salinas, the most populous city in the county—and currently with public finances so ruined it cannot afford to keep its libraries open—is expected to grow from 143,776 people to more than 213,000.

Traffic Jam Ahead

When you ask the guy responsible for figuring out how all these people will get around, you get the doomsday scenario.

Bill Reichmuth was the director of public works for the famously smooth-running city of Monterey for 15 years. For the past two years he's been the head of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC).

The county transportation agency has a 14-year traffic improvement plan worth \$1 billion to ease congestion and widen roads, but nowhere near the money required to pay for it. And when he does the

math for what 200,000 more people will mean to the quality-of-life in the county—as measured in traffic jams and commute times—he comes up with a nightmare.

Planning engineers use a simple factor when computing the number of vehicle trips generated by each household. The universally accepted figures are that each single family home generates 10 vehicle trips per day and each apartment generates six trips per day. Already the math figures out that there are a million vehicle trips per day in Monterey County. Reichmuth figures that 200,000 more people equals an additional half-million trips per day.

That might not be a big deal if the local roads were able to accommodate existing loads, but they are not. Many sections of road are already at capacity, according to reports and as evidenced by regular clogging on Highway 68 and elsewhere.

With the number of car trips increasing by half, don't expect ease of travel.

“That is a substantial impact,” he says. “We have a quality of life we enjoy, whether it's in the agricultural land in the south county or the clean air and beaches and the very human scale of the Monterey Peninsula. That would be disruptive in this kind of environment.”

On the books today, there's a quarter billion dollar plan to build a bypass for Highway 101 at Prunedale. In the meantime, Reichmuth says, the vehicle trips through that bottlenecked area of the county are projected to rise from 55,000 a day now to 87,000 in 2025.

“That's the engineering definition of gridlock,” he says.

The TAMC job list 14 years into the future includes relatively minor upgrades to certain problematic intersections, as well as major road-widening projects. But money from the state derived from the gasoline tax and other sources has been commandeered to balance the budget.

“At the current rate of investment we could never afford it. Ever,” Reichmuth says.

TAMC has been lobbying the county and its 12 city jurisdictions with a two-pronged approach to fix the problem. The agency is proposing a half-cent sales tax across the county that would generate \$400 million over 14 years. It also wants a universal impact fee on new development that would charge \$8,000 per new house and \$5,000 per new apartment to offset pressure on roads from new residents.

As it is now, there are no consistent impact fee programs, he says, noting that housing built under affordable housing programs would have reduced fees.

Reichmuth says the ideas have had a warm reception from local governments.

“From a transportation perspective, we can't build our way out of this,” he says. “We must also face the

issue that we can't not build the roads. There's a mythology that if we don't build it they won't come. If we've learned anything in the last 30 years in California, it's the fallacy of that."

Even Highway 68, which Reichmuth commutes on himself, has several potentials for traffic-alleviating bypasses.

"There's lots of plans," he says, "but we can never afford to build them."

Highway to the Future

Maybe the most apparent location for what amounts to a drastic change in the next few years is what's now a very forgettable corner of Fort Ord. It will be hard to miss in a few short years.

If you go there now—the intersection of Second Avenue and 12th Street, right off Highway 1—you will find a road that goes from nowhere to nowhere.

The hill above the intersection is a cluster of wooden World War II-era army office buildings, some of which have been converted to contemporary use, including the headquarters of the Fort Ord Re-Use Authority (FORA). At its Jan. 21 meeting, the FORA Board officially opened the redesigned Second Avenue, a \$6.5 million project that widened the road to four lanes and installed decorative lampposts and landscaping. It connects the recently completed Imjin Parkway, formerly known as 12th Street, with Lightfighter Drive, the main gate road. There is nothing of significance going on anywhere near this big, modern road.

But if all goes according to plan, this part of Fort Ord—soon to be part of Marina—will be transformed. Where row after row of empty barracks now sit, the University Villages project will line either side of Second Avenue. As noted earlier, the University Villages plan is massive, with more than 1,200 housing units, a huge business park, two hotels and a shopping area to rival the Del Monte Center. It will abut the CSU-Monterey Bay campus in the hope of creating what one observer called "synergy."

Fitting in snugly beside it is the Cypress Knolls development, and beyond that, the 1,050 homes of Marina Heights. Take Imjin Parkway a bit farther down and hook up with Inter-Garrison Road and you will arrive at the East Garrison site.

Just how big it is can be seen on a project model set up by developers in an old chapel on the East Garrison project area. On a diorama that's roughly 20 feet by 10 feet, the idea for a new settlement is laid out in scale models of Monopoly-piece style homes each a bit smaller than an aspirin bottle.

The project has hearings scheduled before the county planning commission in March. If all goes to plan, the developers expect to begin the first phase of 407 homes by the end of summer. The second phase in adjacent land adds 478 homes, and the last phase puts in 515 homes, as well as a town center and art colony.

When finally built, Second Avenue will have four bus stops and, if deemed necessary, an elementary school.

Twenty percent of the units will meet county guidelines for affordable housing. The increased traffic created at East Garrison and elsewhere will require Reservation Road to be widened to four lanes next to the development.

The project managers, Keith McCoy and Ian Gillis of Urban Community Partners, say there's a bit of a chicken-and-egg effect involved, since we need the housing to bring in employers and we need jobs for the people living in the houses.

Developers like McCoy and Gillis and others have done the research and clearly the millions they've already spent planning their project proves that there are buyers out there for the houses. And once the houses are built, potential employers will find the area more attractive, they say.

“You need rooftops—with affordable housing—to generate a big employer coming to Monterey,” says McCoy.

Gillis adds: “The reality is the county is underserved residentially. There is huge pent-up demand.”

McCoy, other developers, city officials and planners like Reichmuth say that in the end, the free market will determine what gets built and what does not. The whole process will be self-regulated by its nature of supply and demand.

“It's not hard to understand why. There's just not enough of a housing supply,” McCoy says. Despite it's large size, he says, East Garrison will “fill a small part of what overall Monterey County needs.”

The problem with leaving housing to a faith in free enterprise is that despite requirements for “affordable housing,” the market may well do what it's been doing lately, and what certain entities have been complaining about for years. Here in the least affordable place in America, the market will demand even more expensive homes—damn the consequences—and when the big plans for Monterey County are realized, the people who cannot earn enough to live here anymore will simply have to go live somewhere else.

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