

## A Good Thing

By Terry Burnes

It's ironic that the county's mistakes in processing the 2,500-unit Park development proposal would turn out to be a good thing. Why? Because they give the county an opportunity to correct the greater mistake of approving the Park proposal, a decision that has now been rescinded but that will be reconsidered, apparently sooner than it should be. At times like this it is wise to back up and think about just what it is you're trying to accomplish, to get your bearings and find some direction. The county's consideration of the Park proposal is part of the master plan update process. Nevada requires that local governments prepare a master plan, and update it periodically, so that communities have a clear idea of how they will grow moving forward. Master plans typically present information and analysis that lead to adopted policies that guide detailed land use and other decisions that govern future growth. It is inherently obvious that the master plan is to be driven by community needs and objectives. Do we want to grow? Where and in what ways? What will be the consequences of that growth and how will they be managed? For reasons I don't understand, the county, as part of the master plan update process, solicited "private" master plan amendment proposals from individual property owners. And the Parks threw their idea in to the hopper, 2,500 additional housing units on the outskirts of Minden. They justified this by the questionable logic of moving mostly theoretical development rights from Topaz, where they're unlikely to be used, to the Carson Valley, where they would become very real and very likely used. So began the consideration of one of the biggest land use changes proposed here in decades, driven not by the public's agenda but by that of one family. If we're going to allow private amendments to be considered as part of the master plan update process it seems to me that the decision on those should come toward the end of the process, after public policy regarding future growth has been decided. Logical questions that should be answered first might include such things as: Do we have a need for more housing? Of what type? Where should it be located? Can we afford it? What will be the impacts of more housing and how will they be managed? The results of that analysis would then be incorporated into master plan policies. Then, if a proposal like the Parks' conforms to all that, fine, approve it. If not, don't. But as this process has been (mis)managed by the county we've seen an insistent push to decide the Park proposal first, and soon, before we've adopted the master plan policies that should guide such a decision. Engaged residents have been objecting to this for months now, yet it took a mistake in the administrative process to bring things to a halt and give us time to reconsider what we're doing. But in the Sept. 7 R-C our new county manager is quoted as saying the plan now is to defer final action on the master plan update to next spring to allow more public input and planning commission consideration of what our master plan policies should be. And go ahead with a decision on the Park proposal now. He's essentially doubling down on the mistakes to date, deciding a private proposal first and the public policies that might guide that decision later. This is like a family struggling with its finances saying, "Let's go ahead and buy that expensive new car, then later we'll make up a budget to see what we can afford. Remember, this is all happening within the master plan update process. It would seem beyond dispute that the information, analysis and policies that guide land use decisions should come before we make any of those decisions, especially the biggest one in decades. Yet the county manager would take exactly the opposite approach. Talk about putting the cart before the horse. To me this is as much about governance as it is about land use. Does our government exist to cut deals with favored citizens and then adjust public policy to provide some cover for that? Or does it exist to serve the larger community's best

interest by following an orderly process to determine public policy and then insisting that both the high and low among us follow it? The Park proposal may or may not make sense for this community. We can't properly decide that now because we have yet to complete the development and adoption of the policy framework required by the state's master planning law to guide such a decision. What I think we do know, wherever we stand on the Park proposal, is that by continuing to put the cart before the horse, putting Park ahead of the community, we render this entire process suspect, eroding citizens' confidence in the local government. I think we can do better and would hope the Parks and our leaders would agree. If nothing else, I hope county commissioners (and planning commissioners) will ask them-selves if , absent the Parks' request, we'd be designating their lands for 2,500 new homes, given the almost complete lack of information about what such a project would mean here? And if we'd be doing that before there's to be a master plan update, the policies that guide such decisions, is complete. I think the answer is clearly no and that tells us what the answer should be to the Parks now. If the master plan update eventually leads to a different conclusion, fine, then we can switch and say yes later. If its mistakes have given the county a chance to do the right thing here. Will it?