

## Chapter 1

### “SLURBANIZING” THE “VALLEY OF THE HEART’S DELIGHT”

“The Valley of the Heart’s Delight” is a quaint tag that community boosters could have hung on any one of many valleys throughout California as they appeared before World War II. The place that bore this particular label, however, was the Santa Clara Valley, located at the southern tip of the San Francisco Bay, and many of its inhabitants considered it aptly named. Orchards stretched across and down the valley, annually enveloping urban pockets in springtime blossoms. In 1921, Roscoe D. Wyatt, manager of the San Jose Chamber of Commerce, produced a film entitled “The Valley of the Heart’s Delight,” with which he intended “to tell the rest of the world about the wonders of the Santa Clara Valley” and promote San Jose “as the future hub of a vast urban and agricultural complex.” Three decades later his dream began to go awry. The label “slurb” is an insult that critics of urban sprawl could have hurled at dozens of conurbations that appeared after World War II, but Karl Belser, the Santa Clara County director of planning, first used it to describe the Santa Clara Valley.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Fellmuth, *Politics of Land: Ralph Nader’s Study Group Report on Land Use in California* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), 32; Karl Belser, “The Making of Slurban America,” *Cry California* 5, no. 4 (1970): 1–21.

The following story might well have been told about several formerly scenic, rural areas of California: the dairies of Orange County or the San Fernando Valley, the orange and lemon groves of the San Gabriel and Pomona valleys, or the vegetable fields of coastal Santa Cruz County. The Santa Clara Valley story is important, however, because growers and planners in the county took their fight against aggressively expanding cities to the state legislature. The determined local effort to rescue farmland from the clutches of urban developers, more so than anywhere else in the state, provoked a decade-long battle to enact state agricultural land conservation legislation.

During the early 1940s, several cities across the nation struggled with the urban problems accompanying wartime mobilization and production, but no one fully anticipated the postwar urban growth awaiting Los Angeles and San Francisco. California's scenic mountains, fertile valleys, and rock- and kelp-strewn coast have lured settlers ever since the flamboyant Gold Rush era, when the state's population increased an average of 15.2 percent annually for a decade. For the most part, people have come seeking humble amenities rather than the promise of riches: better jobs in a mild climate. Following the abnormal 1850 to 1860 surge, the state's population grew yearly by about two-to-five percent (see Table 1). Natural increase accounted for as much as one-third of this annual growth, but most of California's new inhabitants consistently have been migrants. From 1900 to 1979, migrants, foreign and domestic, accounted, on average, for about three-fourths of each year's population increase.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret S. Gordon, *Employment Expansion and Population Growth: The California Experience, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 6, found that net migration accounted for 87.1% of the total California population increase in the decade 1900–1910, 83.8% in 1910–1920, 83.6% in 1920–1930, 85.5% in 1930–1940, and 72.2% in 1940–1950. Her figures therefore indicate that natural increase ranged between 12.9% and 27.8% between 1900 and 1950. Data compiled by and published in Robert K. Arnold, et al., *The California Economy, 1947–1980* (Stanford: Stanford Research Institute, 1961), 28, indicate that between 1941 and 1949 natural increase accounted for 23.2% of the new population, and between 1950 and 1959 the corresponding figure was 38.5%. Data compiled by the Bank of America for the Commonwealth Club and published in "Economic Problems of California's Rapid Growth," *Transactions of the Commonwealth Club* 51 (December 1956): 11, indicate that net civilian migration accounted for about 60% to 85% of decade-to-decade population increase from 1860 to 1955.

TABLE 1. CALIFORNIA POPULATION INCREASE

Decade	Average Annual Increase	
	Number	Percent
1850–1859	28,700	15.2
1860–1869	18,100	4.0
1870–1879	30,400	4.5
1880–1889	34,900	3.4
1890–1899	27,200	2.0
1900–1909	89,200	4.8
1910–1919	104,900	3.1
1920–1929	225,000	5.2
1930–1939	123,000	2.0
1940–1949	367,900	4.4
1950–1959	519,000	4.1
1960–1969	399,800	2.5
1970–1979	395,300	2.0

Data to 1959 compiled by Robert K. Arnold, et al. *The California Economy, 1947–1980* (Stanford: Stanford Research Institute, 1960), 25. Data from 1960–1979 from *Census of the United States, 1970, 1980*.

Conventional wisdom holds that the post–World War II immigration was unprecedented. Looking at absolute numbers, this is certainly true. Moreover, the annual rate of population increase during the 1940s and 1950s was substantially higher than that of the 1930s. But the growth rates of the 1940s and 1950s were hardly unprecedented. The state experienced a much greater rate of population growth during the 1920s than during any other decade after 1860. Then the population grew slowly during the 1930s, making the influx of the 1940s and 1950s appear unusually great. In addition, postwar population growth was most concentrated, as it had been in the past, near the state’s major urban areas (see Table 2). Thus, California’s rate of population growth was not unprecedented. The actual number of people moving annually into urban areas, however, exaggerated a settlement pattern that emerged in the 1920s, when scattered outlying communities, especially

TABLE 2. COUNTY POPULATION GROWTH THAT EXCEEDED STATEWIDE GROWTH 1940–1950 AND 1950–1960 (IN COUNTIES WHERE THE 1940 POPULATION WAS 50,000 OR MORE)

Area	Percent of Total Population Increase	
	1940–1950	1950–1960
<b>The State</b>	53.3	48.5
<b>San Francisco Metro Area</b>		
Contra Costa	197.6	—
Marin	61.8	71.5
San Mateo	110.8	88.6
Santa Clara	66.1	121.1
Solano*	113.4	—
<b>Los Angeles Metro Area</b>		
Orange	65.4	225.6
Riverside	61.1	80.1
San Bernardino	74.8	78.8
<b>San Diego Metro Area</b>		
San Diego	92.4	85.5
<b>Other Counties</b>		
Fresno	54.9	81.3
Kern	69.0	—
Monterey	78.7	52.0
Sacramento	62.7	81.4
Santa Barbara	—	72.0
Stanislaus	69.9	69.9
<p>* Solano County had a population of 49,118 in 1940.            (—) indicates that growth was less than statewide average.            Source: Census of the United States, 1940, 1950, 1960.</p>		

those around Los Angeles, began to acquire the populations that made them suburbs of larger cities.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1940s, growth was most remarkable in the San Francisco Bay Area, where the population doubled from 517,709 in 1940 to 1,062,245 in 1950.<sup>4</sup> Three counties experienced the largest increases: Solano and Contra Costa to the east of the city proper, and San Mateo to the south. It was during the 1940s that the Bay Area began to acquire the population that transformed San Francisco from a city into a metropolitan region. During the 1950s, overall state population growth declined, but it continued unabated in the Bay Area as well as in the Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas. To the north, the direction of urban growth shifted to the southern tip of San Francisco Bay in Santa Clara County; in the south, the Los Angeles metropolitan area swelled to fill Orange County and began pushing into San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Population growth in Santa Clara and Orange counties attracted attention because both had well-established identities as prosperous small-farming areas and both quickly lost their predominantly rural character to urban growth during the 1950s. In Santa Clara County, urban dwellers increased by 183.9 percent, while rural dwellers decreased by 61.1 percent. In Orange County, the urban population increased 361.4 percent, while the rural population decreased by 58.4 percent.

Such tremendous urban growth obviously had to affect the land resources in these two counties (see Table 3). In Santa Clara County, farmland decreased by 269,000 acres between 1945 and 1964, an average loss of 17,000 acres per year. The greatest losses were sustained between 1945 and 1950, when an average of 23,000 acres of farmland annually disappeared. In Orange County, although farmland was not converted to urban use as early, the drop in agricultural acreage, when it came, was sudden and nearly as steep. Between 1945 and 1950, the number of acres in Orange County

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Norvell Jamison, *Coordinated Public Planning in the Los Angeles Region* (Los Angeles: UCLA Bureau of Governmental Research, June 1948) includes a useful table of population growth from 1910 to 1947 that is arrayed by towns and cities as they were incorporated; see Table II, 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, *Population Census, 1940, 1950*. The 1950 census lists eight counties or parts of counties combined to form the “San Francisco–Oakland urbanized area”: Alameda (part), Contra Costa (part), Marin (part), Napa (part), San Francisco County and City, San Mateo (part), Santa Clara (part), Solano (part).

farmland actually increased, but dropped in the early 1950s from 383,000 to 344,000 acres, a figure that held constant until the late 1950s. Then, between 1959 and 1964, the county lost about 100,000 acres of farmland to nonagricultural uses, an average loss of 20,000 acres per year for five years.

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF FARMS AND ACRES IN FARMLAND, 1945–1964

County	1945	1950	1954	1959	1964
<b>Santa Clara</b>					
Acres	727,000	589,000	590,000	529,000	458,000
Number	5,914	5,282	4,953	3,345	2,631
<b>Orange</b>					
Acres	347,000	383,000	344,000	346,000	243,000
Number	5,621	5,713	4,593	3,352	1,542
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, City and County Data Book, 1949, 1952, 1956, 1962, 1967.					

Both counties, moreover, lost well over half of their farms during those two decades. Nowhere else in the state were population growth and its geographic consequences so pronounced as in these two counties, where the dramatic postwar demographic shift set the stage for a major legislative preoccupation of the 1950s and 1960s: agricultural land conservation.

## ORCHARDS TO INDUSTRY

Agricultural pockets survive, even if agriculture does not thrive as it once did, in the Bay Area and Los Angeles conurbations. Overall, California is still the nation's top agricultural producer, but in the postwar years, the state's economy became much more diverse. In the process, much of Santa Clara County was sacrificed to new, Cold War-generated industry. A combination of factors attracted industry to the valley after World War II: federal government-sponsored research in electronics, nearby urban markets, abundant and inexpensive land available for large plant operations, and cities and developers willing to underwrite the cost of infrastructures.

During the early 1950s, however, a small group of Santa Clara County growers and county planners watched industrialization and urban growth with a mixture of disbelief and anger, particularly since many of the valley's former caretakers were now among its chief despoilers and often considered protestations as attacks on "progress." To this concerned group, Santa Clara's fallen orchards presaged ruination: bulldozers were fashioning an example of rural California's future. The urgency of the situation prompted planners and growers to act swiftly and with determination. Despite, or perhaps because of, the urgency, they experimented with fresh but promising planning ideas in hopes of balancing urban growth with farmland conservation.

The shopping centers, rows of nearly identical houses, and industrial plants contrasted starkly with the valley's prewar beauty. Orchard growing in the Santa Clara Valley dates from the Spanish and Mexican periods when fruits and vegetables were grown, mostly on mission lands, for local consumption. Commercial orchards, however, came with the Gold Rush, as enterprising migrants took advantage of fertile soils, a temperate climate, and hungry gold-seekers to cultivate a profitable local fresh produce market. By the mid-1860s, growers were actually producing more than the local market could handle, inasmuch as the market area was geographically restricted by mountains to the east.

Commercial agriculture might have subsided with the Gold Rush except that the transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, allowed growers to exploit eastern markets as well as new markets opening in the West. The port of San Francisco continued to handle a sizable tonnage of grain shipments, which railroad cars now sped to the docks; but after 1869, the port was also in competition with railroads for long-distance shipments. In the 1870s, local entrepreneurs developed the first commercial fruit drying and canning operations; this, combined with newly available rail transportation, further encouraged growers to expand production because they could ship preserved fruit quickly to points east. During the same decade farmers planting vineyards, grain fields, and vegetable crops began to push cattle ranchers toward the foothills; and by 1880 the commercial fruit and vegetable industry had forced out the grain industry as well. From 1870 on, growers worked assiduously to make the valley produce copious quantities of peaches, prune plums, plums, apricots,

cherries, walnuts, grapes, and a multitude of vegetables. By the turn of the twentieth century, nearly 100,000 acres of orchards covered the valley floor, which was neatly parceled into farms ranging from ten to one hundred acres in size.<sup>5</sup>

By 1920, orchard farming was so intensive that irrigators had irreversibly depleted the fresh water artesian basin beneath them, and the valley floor had begun to sink. The fertile soil and temperate climate nevertheless induced growers to remain, and the arrival of canneries encouraged continued expansion. In 1907, Libby, McNeil, and Libby shipped its first seasonal “pack” — four hundred tons of canned apricots and cherries. Later, Del Monte and Sunsweet opened operations in the valley; and in the early 1920s these three food-processing firms established the valley as a major cannery, fully compatible with the fruit, nut, and vegetable crops for which the area was now well known. Local trucking companies supplied fresh produce to a regional market; and two railroads, Southern Pacific and Western Pacific, carried fresh, canned, and later frozen produce throughout the United States. Between 1920 and 1940 this powerful, small-farm produce industry continued to expand, aided by Amadeo Giannini’s financing innovation: the branch bank. Statewide banking operations made it possible for the San Francisco-based Bank of Italy to offset possible losses in one agricultural sector or geographic region with potential profits in other sectors or regions. Diversifying risks allowed the bank to underwrite agricultural expansion without fear of extensive bank losses. Over 200 food-processing firms located in the valley between 1920 and 1940. In that same period, a water conservation program was established. In 1926, the Santa Clara Valley Water Conservation District began to promote and design a system of reservoirs that would store winter flood water to replace diminishing groundwater supplies; and in 1934 voters approved a bond issue that allowed construction to begin on

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Kinnard, *History of the Greater San Francisco Bay Region*, v. 2 (New York and West Palm Beach: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1966), 330–356; Gerald D. Nash, *State Government and Economic Development: A History of Administrative Policies, 1849–1933* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of Governmental Studies, 1964), 213–224; David W. Salmon, “The Metropolitan Area of Santa Clara County, California” (M.A. thesis, Stanford University, 1946), 37–47.

the first of six reservoirs that would sustain the agriculture fueling the valley's economy.<sup>6</sup>

By 1940, Santa Clara Valley was fully covered with modest-sized farms and small towns arrayed around the urban hub of San Jose. The county was among the most agriculturally productive in the entire United States. Agriculture and related industry accounted for over 90 percent of the county's employment; less than 8 percent of the workforce was employed by nonagricultural manufacturing firms. Nestled between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range, the county enjoyed a Mediterranean climate that made it, as the Chamber of Commerce advertised, the "Valley of the Heart's Delight."<sup>7</sup>

Industrial growth sparked postwar migration to the Bay Area. In Santa Clara County, as well as in the entire nine-county area, industrialization was the result of prewar federal defense planning, postwar industrial decentralization, and, to a lesser extent, Chamber of Commerce promotional efforts. In the 1930s, the federal government undertook the construction of several military installations to form a secondary ring of defense around the existing installations at the mouth of the San Francisco Bay. This secondary ring was located along the perimeter of the bay, and northern Santa Clara County was chosen as one of the sites. Between 1931 and 1933, the federal government spent about \$5 million to build Moffett Field. First known as Sunnyvale Air Station, it was originally intended for use by the Navy as the West Coast base for dirigible transport operations, although the Navy abandoned its plans for a transport fleet after the Akron and the Macon, its first airships, crashed in 1933 and 1935 mishaps.

Bay Area businessmen worked hard to bring this federal project to Santa Clara County. In 1928, the San Jose Chamber of Commerce initiated

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<sup>6</sup> Kinnard, *loc cit.*; *Population Census*, 1910, 1920; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *City and County Data book*, 1949; Jeanette Befame, "Anniversary for Libby, Growth Cited," *San Jose Mercury* [hereinafter cited as *SJM*], August 29, 1957, 21; Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (New York: Current Books, Inc., 1949), 230–232; Seonaid McArthur, ed., *Water in the Santa Clara Valley: A History* (San Jose: De Anza College, California History Center, Local History Studies, v. 27, 1981), 21–41.

<sup>7</sup> Santa Clara County Planning Department [hereinafter cited as SCCo Plan Dept], *Land Use Issues in Santa Clara County*, December 1963, n.p.; not only did the Chamber of Commerce use this slogan in its publications, but the chamber's letterhead bore this motto as well.

a fundraising effort to purchase land for the proposed air station. With assistance from the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and the City of San Mateo, it eventually raised \$360,000 to secure the land it needed to persuade the Navy to build an installation at the southern tip of the bay. As the depression of the 1930s deepened, few citizens questioned the wisdom of courting a federal construction project which would inject \$5 million into the local economy.<sup>8</sup>

Military installations made the Bay Area attractive to industry, and World War II further demonstrated how military installations stimulated research and development operations. In 1940 the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics began constructing Ames Research Laboratory near Moffett Field. The federal government, moreover, induced academic scientists into wartime service, and nearby Stanford University joined a handful of elite universities throughout the country in developing sophisticated electronic equipment for national defense purposes. Local industry also profited from the war effort. For example, Food Machinery and Chemical Corporation (FMC), the county's leading manufacturer of agricultural and food-processing machinery, also produced amphibious tanks during the war years. In 1951, FMC shifted its manufacturing emphasis when it procured a multimillion-dollar contract to build tanks for the Army. By 1956, nearly half of FMC's workforce was employed in the company's new ordnance division.<sup>9</sup>

The presence of a military base, defense-oriented research facilities, proximity to urban markets, and abundant land suitable for development made Santa Clara County attractive to new and expanding industries in the postwar years. In 1948, International Business Machines (IBM) established a card-printing plant in San Jose to serve its electronic calculators,

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<sup>8</sup> City of San Jose, *Your Government: The 1940 Municipal Report of San Jose, California* (San Jose, 1940), 32; Bob Crabbe, "Huge Moffett Field 20 Years Old — And Still Growing," *SJM*, April 12, 1953; "Old Timers Turn Back the Valley's Clock," *SJM*, June 13, 1956; Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: A Metropolis in Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 221.

<sup>9</sup> City of San Jose, *Your Government: The 1940 Municipal Report* (San Jose, 1940), 32, and *Your City Government, 1941-1942-1943* (San Jose, 1943), 6; "FM&C Plans Additional \$25,000 Expansion," *SJM*, January 31, 1951; "Work Swift on Ordnance Plant Here," *SJM*, April 7, 1951; County of Santa Clara, *1956 Bonds*, February 14, 1956 (voter pamphlet).

introduced in the same year. Also in 1948, Russell and Sigurd Varian, inventors of the klystron tube, founded Varian Associates, which in a few years was manufacturing more than eighty types of microwave tubes plus a variety of other electronic devices for use in the chemical, geophysical, and communications fields.<sup>10</sup> Wartime prosperity, moreover, prompted the San Jose Chamber of Commerce to join the ranks of business organizations that sought to keep the postwar economy from foundering once defense industries shut down. In 1943, the chamber established committees to encourage industrial growth and plan for housing. The following year the chamber persuaded the San Jose City Council and the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to budget a total of \$35,000 to launch an ambitious advertising program. In 1950, the chamber boasted that over fifty new industries had entered the valley since 1944; by 1954, another 124 firms had joined them.<sup>11</sup>

The industrial firms that appeared in the 1940s did not unduly disrupt the county's predominantly rural character. And even though growth was rapid by previous standards, most residents were generally satisfied with the steady integration of industry and agriculture during the 1940s. Their tandem strength was seen as a way to prevent the economic hardships experienced during the 1930s from recurring. Few imagined that industry would impair, let alone replace, agriculture. Industrial Survey Associates (ISA), a San Francisco-based consulting firm, prepared an economic survey for the San Jose Chamber of Commerce in 1948. In its report, the firm predicted that "agriculture w[ould] continue to be a major factor in the local economy" although it expected orchard production "to decline slowly in favor of more truck farming, dairying, and other operations" which would cater to a growing urban market for fresh produce. ISA furthermore predicted, inaccurately, that the population influx had peaked in the 1940s, and that the rate of growth would be much less during the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "IBM: Campus-Like Plant," *SJM*, January 19, 1958; "Big Spurt Shown by Varian," *SJM*, January 19, 1958.

<sup>11</sup> *SJM*, June 13, 1956; "Growth — A Statistical Picture" in *1956 Bonds*, n.p.; S.A. Miller, "San Jose Chamber of Commerce," in Bertha M. Rice, *The Builders of Our Valley* (San Jose, 1957), 111–112.

<sup>12</sup> Industrial Survey Associates, "San Jose and Santa Clara County: An Economic Survey with Particular Reference to Industrial Growth" (report prepared for the San Jose Chamber of Commerce and presented May 1948), 49–50, 53, 55–56.

The turning point for industrial growth in Santa Clara County came in February, 1953, when Ford Motor Company announced that it would relocate its Richmond, California, assembly plant to a 150-acre site near Milpitas, a small community northeast of San Jose. The plant was estimated to cost more than \$40 million and employ about 4,000 workers. The San Jose Chamber of Commerce quickly claimed to have played a major behind-the-scenes role in persuading Ford to relocate in the valley rather than in one of several other California sites also under consideration. A spokesperson divulged that the chamber had “been aware of the company’s interest in the San Jose area for some time, but since any adverse publicity might have jeopardized the company’s decision to move here, we had to deny all rumors.” The spokesperson further revealed that the chamber’s committee in charge of promoting industrial development had “compiled a mass of statistical material for the company through a third party” without bothering to inquire “for whom [the] information was being prepared.” Such dealings were by now commonplace for the chamber: it had “performed the same service in like circumstances in the past.”<sup>13</sup>

The chamber’s boast no doubt overstates its role inasmuch as Ford deliberately chose a site outside San Jose’s city limits and proximate to service from two railroads. Moreover, Western Pacific, from whom Ford purchased the assembly plant site, announced shortly thereafter that it would construct a 500-car switchyard to handle Ford’s rail traffic. Ford’s decision to enter the valley nevertheless was the cue that other firms had been awaiting. In mid-February, San Jose Steel announced that it had purchased a thirty-acre site about a mile south of the proposed Ford plant, where it planned to relocate its expanding operation. Later in the same month, Monsanto Corporation reported that it would move its western headquarters from Seattle to Santa Clara, where it would join a four-year-old plant which had “undergone almost constant expansion.” The latter news particularly concerned planners and many area residents, alerting them to the very real possibility that industrial growth might bring unwanted air pollution.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “\$50 Million Ford Plant for San Jose,” *SJM*, February 4, 1953; “Ford Confirms Buying Site,” *SJM*, February 17, 1953.

<sup>14</sup> “W.P. Will Build 500-Car Switch Yard to Handle Ford Plant’s Rail Traffic,” *SJM*, February 17, 1953; “S.J. Steel Buys Land Near Ford Plant Site,” *SJM*, February 25, 1953; “Monsanto Will Move West Headquarters to Santa Clara,” *SJM*, March 26, 1953; letter

Heady with success, the San Jose Chamber of Commerce launched another promotional campaign in late February, 1953, sending 2,000 selected industries brochures hailing the theme, “If it’s good enough for Ford, it’s good enough for us.” The *San Jose Mercury* and the *San Jose News* assisted the chamber by supplying, cost-free, reprints of their front-page stories announcing the Ford decision. Some valley residents were equally ecstatic, especially landowners in the Milpitas area, where real estate prices jumped from about \$1,250 per acre to almost \$2,000 per acre. One “working stiff,” as he identified himself in a letter to the editor of the *Mercury*, even went so far as to suggest publicly that Milpitas residents should “get on the ball,” for here was “a chance to change the name of ‘Milpitas’ to ‘Ford’ or ‘Fordson.’”<sup>15</sup>

Between 1953 and 1955, agricultural production and employment in Santa Clara County plummeted, while employment in the electronic and durable goods manufacturing industries soared. By 1956, three major industrial firms provided the lion’s share of year-round jobs: Ford Motor Company employed about 3,000, Westinghouse Electric Corporation another 3,000, and Food Machinery and Chemical Corporation topped 2,000.<sup>16</sup> Canning and packing companies continued to provide many seasonal jobs, but their importance waned as more and more orchards vanished, replaced by urban places with sentimentally rural names such as Pruneridge Shopping Center, the San Tomas Orchards housing development, or the Blossom Hill Manor subdivision.

Industrial parks, a development concept simultaneously exploited by Stanford University, city governments, and major landowners — especially Southern Pacific — further encouraged industrial growth in the valley during the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> Stanford University, for example, announced in April 1953

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to author from Abraam Krushkhov, AICP, January 27, 1983 (Krushkhov served as a senior planner in the county planning department from 1952–1956, during which time he “participated as a planning staff member in all the discussions with Karl Nipper, the WPRR land agent, regarding the selection of Milpitas as the site for the Ford Motor Company plant.”).

<sup>15</sup> “C of C Steps Up Its Drive for Industry,” *SJM*, February 26, 1953; “Board Okays Industrial Area Survey,” *SJM*, March 5, 1953; letter to the editor, *SJM*, February 9, 1953.

<sup>16</sup> *Land Use Issues in Santa Clara County*, 4; *1956 Bonds*, n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Travis, “A Study of Industrial Site Development and Site Choice in Santa Clara County, 1950–1959” (mimeographed report, San Jose State University: Real Estate Research Bureau, n.d. but probably early 1960s), especially 13–24. Travis found

that it planned to locate industrial, commercial, and residential developments on 6,000 acres of its vast landholdings. The industrial area was to be situated conveniently adjacent to Southern Pacific lines. The first two occupants in the new Stanford Industrial Park were Varian Associates and Eastman Kodak; later they were joined by Lockheed's research division and many other electronics and nuclear energy research and development firms.<sup>18</sup>

Southern Pacific and the City of Sunnyvale cooperated in a similar venture. In the early 1950s, Southern Pacific began trading and buying land to secure contiguous parcels that, by mid-1956, became an industrial park of over 800 acres. During the same time, the City of Sunnyvale annexed parcels in the proposed industrial area, zoned them for industrial use, and used revenue bonds to purchase water and sewer lines. So determined were industrial growth advocates that when, in 1955, the owner of 200 acres in the area presented a request to have the zoning changed from industrial to residential so that he might erect a housing subdivision, the Sunnyvale Chamber of Commerce led a fierce campaign to prevent the change. Sunnyvale's pro-industry faction was rewarded in June 1956, when General Motors acquired title, from Southern Pacific, to nearly 250 acres of land in Sunnyvale's industrial area, where the company sited a new assembly plant. When Lockheed shortly thereafter decided to construct a new guided missile development center in the city's industrial park, growth advocates could hardly contain their joy over the prospects for a land sales boom.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the decade, north Santa Clara County housed many of the leading firms in the research and development as well as the budding micro-electronics industries. In the late 1940s, nearly everyone welcomed industrial growth and corporate expansion, believing they would strengthen the local economy. Because no one foresaw that business and industry would undermine agriculture, no local governmental body was under pressure to establish land-use priorities.

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that access to markets and availability of land for construction were the two factors that most influenced firms to locate in Santa Clara County in the 1950s.

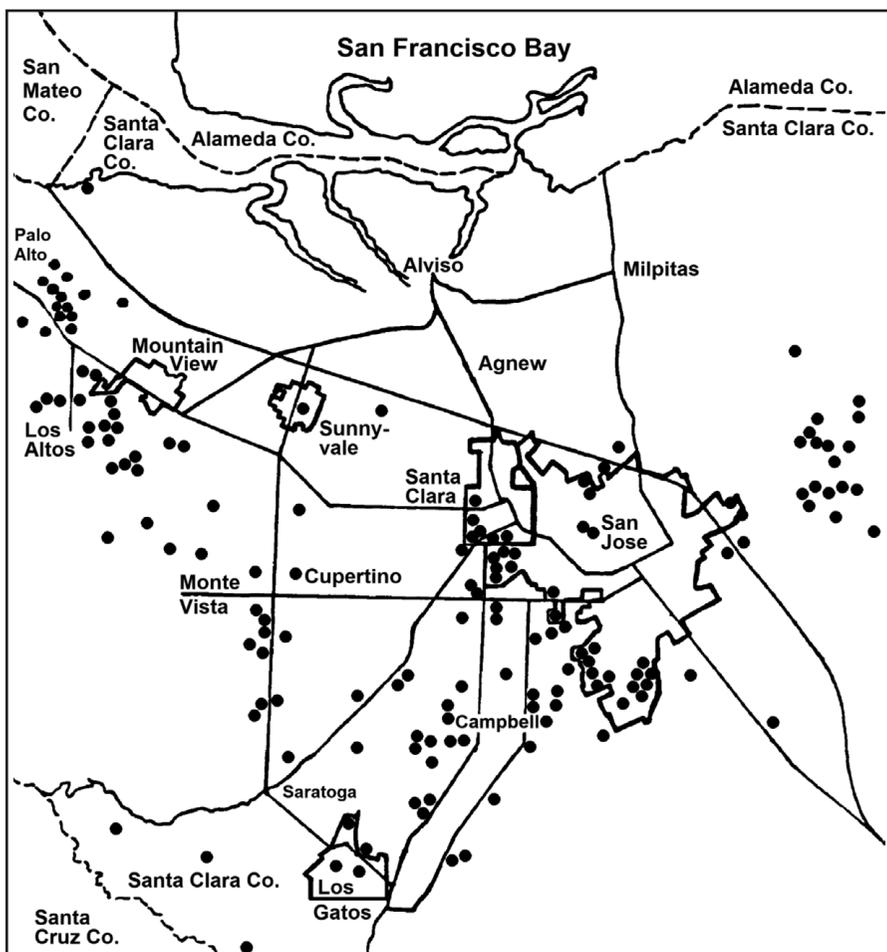
<sup>18</sup> "Planning Firm Retained for Huge Development," *SJM*, April 23, 1953; "Lockheed to Build Big Missile Lab at Stanford," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 1, 1956.

<sup>19</sup> Glenn Brown, "City-Chamber Planning Nets G.M. Plum," *Daily Palo Alto Times*, March 31, 1956; "Sunnyvale Gets New G.M. Plant; Land Sales Boom," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 31, 1956; "General Motors Completes Sunnyvale Land Purchase," *SJM*, June 23, 1956.

## URBAN GROWTH AND MUNICIPAL ANNEXATION RIVALRY

Industrial growth triggered population growth, and a vigorous real estate market emerged. In the nine months between April 1950 and January 1951, about 20,000 new residents settled in the county. Forty-five thousand followed during the next two years, and the stream continued uninterrupted. Huge subdivisions of moderately priced, look-alike houses

### NEW HOUSING SUBDIVISIONS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY



Dots indicate housing subdivisions that appeared in Santa Clara County from April 1950 to April 1951. Based on map designed by Santa Clara County Planning Department and published in the *San Jose Mercury*, April 15, 1951.

arose to accommodate this burgeoning urban population (see map, page 127). In the first three months of 1951, for instance, construction began on thirteen subdivisions ranging in size from 90 to 1,200 homes which, when completed, added nearly 7,000 single family dwellings to the existing housing stock. For the most part, these subdivisions were not sited within existing city boundaries, but hither and yon in unincorporated areas.<sup>20</sup>

Whereas cities annexed land conservatively during the late 1940s to attract industry, the haphazardly placed subdivisions which housed the new workforce incited a municipal scramble for control over outlying residential areas. The Losse Ranch subdivision is an instructive example of what became commonplace. In March 1951, KAR Construction Company announced that it planned to build 500 single family dwellings “at popular prices for veterans and working men” on the 123-acre ranch, which it had just purchased for \$250,000. The parcel formerly belonged to what once had been among the largest fruit ranches in the valley — 446 acres of apricot, cherry, prune, and peach orchards originally purchased by Henry E. Losse in the 1880s. One-third of the original ranch, divided among Losse’s three children when he died, was sold to developers. KAR Construction ran into some difficulty, however, because the 123-acre ranch was three-quarters of a mile from the nearest city boundary. In order to avoid incurring unwanted costs for providing municipal services to the area, KAR sought to have the ranch annexed to the City of Sunnyvale. California law required that annexed land be contiguous with prevailing city boundaries, but Sunnyvale city officials realized that 500 lots of appreciating property would considerably enhance the city’s tax base. The city therefore agreed to undertake negotiations with the owners along a 200-acre strip of what City Manager H.K. Hunter termed “intervening property,” invoking the Uninhabited Territories Annexation Act to expedite these negotiations. This act, a heretofore little-used 1939 law, allowed cities to annex any contiguous territory in which fewer

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<sup>20</sup> “County’s Population now 308,900 — Gain of 6.9%,” *SJM*, January 10, 1951; Norman Bowman, “Boom ’52 Promises Even Better for ’53,” *SJM*, January 1, 1953; Jeannette Befame, “Subdivision Homes Mushroom in County,” *SJM*, April 15, 1951.

than twelve registered voters lived if two-thirds of the landowners agreed to the annexation.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, when San Jose wanted to annex land south of the city for future industrial expansion in late 1952, it also invoked the Uninhabited Territories Annexation Act and drew boundaries around approximately 440 acres in such a way as to exclude over seventy registered voters. It then further divided the land into two proposed annexation parcels, known as Monterey Parks One and Two, so that only six registered voters resided in one and only eight in the other, thus avoiding a vote of the affected residents.<sup>22</sup>

Although Sunnyvale gained a justified reputation as an aggressive city, annexation rivalry was particularly keen between the cities of San Jose and Santa Clara. Whereas San Jose annexed land only fourteen times and Santa Clara only three times between their respective dates of incorporation and 1945, the situation began to change in 1946. In that year San Jose annexed four tracts, another five in 1947, seven in 1949, and ten in 1950, for a four-year total of thirty-two annexations. From 1946 through 1950, Santa Clara annexed only four tracts, but in 1951 the city suddenly annexed six tracts, then another nine in 1952, thereby adding over 500 acres to the city in two years. In the same two-year period, San Jose annexed another sixteen parcels totaling over 1,000 acres.<sup>23</sup>

Some have attributed the genesis of annexation rivalry to one city official, A.P. Hamann, San Jose city manager, who gained local notoriety for quipping that San Jose would become the “Los Angeles of the North.” Hamann’s flagrant boosterism made him an easy target for the local media, but many city officials willingly, if self-defensively, played annexation one-upmanship. San Jose, however, eventually earned the dubious distinction of being called a “misplanned city,” based on evidence

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<sup>21</sup> “\$5,000,000 Subdivision Deal for Sunnyvale Area Revealed,” *SJM*, March 2, 1951; “300-Acre Area May Be Added to Sunnyvale,” *SJM*, April 7, 1951; *California Statutes and Amendments to the Code* [hereafter cited as *California Statutes*], 1939, Chapter 297.

<sup>22</sup> “Four-Hour Hearing Bares Battle Lines” *SJM*, January 24, 1953.

<sup>23</sup> Annexation data compiled by Carlos Robert Cavanagh in “Urban Expansion and Physical Planning in San Jose, California: A Case Study” (M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1953), 75–79; see also Keith Kaldenbach, “The ‘Topsy,’ and How They Grew,” *SJM*, February 6, 1955, Magazine section.

that city officials consciously allowed growth “to take place not where inhabitants as a whole wanted it, nor where reason dictated, but rather wherever developers chose.”<sup>24</sup>

Developers chose to build wherever plentiful land could be purchased inexpensively, and, until mid-1953, there were no legal restrictions on the choice of location. Cities, in turn, vied with one another to annex revenue-producing residential, commercial, or industrial areas. During 1953 hardly a day passed that the local press did not report on the anarchic situation, often describing the fray in militaristic terms by likening proposed annexations to “encircling movements” or “pincers.” In March, 1953, San Jose’s assistant city attorney resigned “because of differences with his superiors over the city’s annexation program,” which included any sort of annexation bid not specifically prohibited by law.<sup>25</sup> The city attorney, whose legal acumen repeatedly helped San Jose to prevail in court, admitted that rivalry had led to “a fantastic series of conquests under the guise of annexations.”<sup>26</sup>

Intercity warfare peaked and then subsided quickly in 1953, after Santa Clara County Assemblyman Bruce F. Allen introduced state legislation to replace the ineffectual County Boundaries Commission with a new annexation commission operating under guidelines designed to restore order to urban growth.<sup>27</sup> The Santa Clara County Planning Department and Planning Commission, moreover, began to take an increasingly active interest in annexation bids that threatened valuable orchard land. Cities suddenly realized that their squabbling had attracted outside attention which might have unwanted consequences.

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<sup>24</sup> Stanford Environmental Law Society, “San Jose: Sprawling City. A Report on Land Use Policies and Practices in San Jose, California” (Stanford: Stanford Law School, March 1971), 16–28.

<sup>25</sup> “Rendler Out; Quits Over Annexations,” *SJM*, March 18, 1953. See also “Two Eastside Districts Drop Suit Against San Jose Annexation,” *SJM*, May 28, 1953 and “The Southern Annexations: Four-Hour Hearing Bares Battle Lines,” *SJM*, January 24, 1953.

<sup>26</sup> As quoted in Cavanagh, “Urban Expansion and Physical Planning in San Jose,” 40.

<sup>27</sup> Wes Peyton, “Strip Annexations Would Be Outlawed by Allen’s Measure,” *SJM*, January 18, 1953. The *Mercury* followed the progress of this and several other annexation bills Allen introduced in 1953, and the one bill that finally passed pertained only to rural school districts which might be included in municipal annexation proposals.

In the 1950s, the county's demographics shifted quickly in favor of urban or urbanizing areas, while the reins of county government remained in the hands of a decreasing rural, farm population. By 1958, three of the five supervisorial districts contained only 24 percent of the county's population. The more densely settled areas of western San Jose, Palo Alto, Mountain View, Los Altos, Los Gatos, Saratoga, Sunnyvale, and Almaden housed three-quarters of the county's residents, who were now represented by a minority of two on the county Board of Supervisors. Anticipating the emerging disproportionate representation on the board, cities banded together in mid-1954 to create the Inter-City Council (ICC) thinking that they "could achieve more if they went to the county government with a unified position," presumably meaning that they could prevent the county from interfering with municipal annexation plans. As a body that had only advisory powers and depended upon voluntary participation, the ICC never served as a "vehicle to answer area problems," as some of its members originally hoped it would. Nevertheless, the council created a forum that allowed city officials to declare a truce which eased intercity annexation rivalry.<sup>28</sup>

## THE RURAL BACKLASH: EXCLUSIVE AGRICULTURAL ZONING

In 1951, county officials declined to become embroiled in annexation issues because to do so would have interfered in municipal politics.<sup>29</sup> By 1953, however, aggressive municipal expansion had generated more than intercity rivalry; city officials had angered many local orchard specialists by encouraging so-called leapfrog urban growth and thereby enticing other growers to sell land for urban development. Fruit growers were particularly concerned because orchard crops require a long-term investment: new orchards do not immediately produce commercially profitable quantities.

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<sup>28</sup> This information is taken from David Robert Armstrong's excellent case study of the Inter-City Council, which was done twelve years after the council's formation; Armstrong, "The Inter-City Council: An Experiment in Intergovernmental Cooperation in Santa Clara County" (M.A. thesis, San Jose State University, 1966), especially 52–53, 73–74, 89, and 94–99.

<sup>29</sup> "County, Palo Alto Planners Confer," *SJM*, January 18, 1951.

Escalating rural land values pushed up farm property tax assessments, which threatened to undermine the modest, but relatively stable profit margin on which growers operated.

Growers who did not want to sell their land were not, however, of one mind about how best to protect farmland vis-à-vis urban encroachment. In February, 1953, the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau challenged the County Planning Commission when the latter proposed an interim zoning plan for the unzoned eastern side of the county. The interim zone was intended to give county planning staff time to prepare a master plan with precise zoning recommendations based on a special land-use study the commission had just authorized. Farm Bureau president Wilton A. Stine criticized the need to zone, even on an interim basis, such a large area when “emergency situations” (i.e., conflicts arising from land-use decisions adversely affecting a limited number of agricultural landowners) were localized. He further charged that the proposal was “an attempt on the part of planners to place unwanted restrictions on property.”<sup>30</sup>

Santa Clara County nonetheless inaugurated the farmland conservation movement in California on April 8, 1951, when the County Planning Commission proposed to amend the zoning ordinance and establish an exclusive agricultural zoning classification. This action came in response to an appeal presented by fifteen pear growers near Agnew, a small community located northeast of Santa Clara City. Planning Commissioner Will Weston was also one of the petitioners. Weston expressed hope that the Farm Bureau would support the proposed amendment, but the group declined to take a position at that time.<sup>31</sup> The farm group did, however, establish a task force in mid-1954 to study the threat of urban expansion to the county’s agricultural industry as a whole, and the organization later went on record as supporting agricultural land protection. Nevertheless, Raymond C. Benech, one-time president of the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau and a former planning commissioner, claims that the group’s

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<sup>30</sup> Santa Clara County Planning Commission [hereinafter cited as SCCo Plan Comm], *Minutes*, v. 8, 172, 211; “Farm Bureau Turns Cool Eye on Interim Zoning,” *SJM*, February 19, 1953.

<sup>31</sup> SCCo Plan Comm, *Minutes*, v. 8, 254–255; “County Plan Board Asks Curb on Farm Land ‘Dwindling,’” *SJM*, June 18, 1953.

support only “meant that the Farm Bureau wanted land to be gobbled up very slowly so that farmers could get a higher price for their orchards.”<sup>32</sup>

In the early 1950s, agricultural landowners clearly were divided over the issue of agricultural zoning, but there was no prolonged public debate that would define group interests. Eliciting no formal opposition to the proposed exclusive agricultural zoning amendment other than the cool Farm Bureau response, the Planning Commission formally requested the Board of Supervisors to approve the amendment. The board duly granted its approval. The ordinance created an exclusive agricultural zone classification that prohibited “uses which would destroy the value of certain areas for agricultural purposes.” Appropriate agricultural uses, however, were broadly defined in the ordinance to include nurseries, botanical conservatories, arboreta, riding academies, stables, fur farms, and guest ranches. Technically, therefore, the ordinance could be used to cover many land uses pursued by part-time or avocational farmers. The measure’s broad applicability and implementation based on voluntary inclusion no doubt explain, in part, why the measure was not opposed more vigorously. In April, 1954, the Planning Commission created the county’s first greenbelt: 744 acres of pear orchards near Agnew in the hands of fifteen owners (the same fifteen petitioners) whose orchards ranged in size from twelve to 240 acres.<sup>33</sup>

A closer look at the record reveals that a handful of committed individuals actually created the exclusive agricultural zoning ordinance. Will Weston was indisputably the catalyst. As early as 1951 he enlisted the aid of County Planning Director Nestor Barrett and County Zoning Administrator John Haas to create a special zoning district that would protect the pear orchards in the Agnew area from residential subdivisions. When Karl Belser succeeded Nestor Barrett in May 1952, he imbued the nascent idea with a philosophy of planning which was strongly influenced by programs

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<sup>32</sup> Carroll K. Hurd, “Where Do Farmers Go From Here?,” *SJM*, February 6, 1955, Magazine section; author interview with Raymond C. Benech, July 14, 1982, San Jose (At the time, Benech owned an orchard ranch located on the southern outskirts of San Jose, with apricots and pears as the principal crops. He served as president of the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau from 1959 to 1971, and as a Santa Clara County planning commissioner from 1970–1982.).

<sup>33</sup> SSCo Plan Comm, *Minutes*, v. 9, 47, 55, 85, 85A–B, 86; “Santa Clara ‘Green Belt’ Plan Votes,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 8, 1954.

of the 1930s National Resources Planning Board and which resembled the original garden city concepts of Ebenezer Howard.<sup>34</sup>

In 1953, Belser prepared a “sphere of influence” study in which he set forth a plan for “an agricultural greenbelt [that] would divide cities to keep them separate so they could keep their identities.” Belser first “map[ped] out the best soils in the county, and these became the areas he was primarily concerned with.” This map detailed areas best suited for watershed, swampland, mountain open space, orchards and farms, light- and high-density residential, commercial, industrial, and public and semi-public uses. Belser’s ultimate goal was twofold: to “preserve agricultural land” and, at the same time, “lend definition to the urban areas.” City officials, however, were openly critical of his plan, which they quite accurately perceived as the first step toward delimiting annexable areas and thereby controlling urban expansion.<sup>35</sup>

In late 1953, Belser assigned Abraam Krushkhov, a senior planner in the department, to meet with the Agnew pear growers. Krushkhov’s resulting map outlined the first proposed exclusive agricultural zoning district in the county, formally designated such after the zoning ordinance was adopted in early 1954. Belser’s “sphere of influence” plan and Krushkhov’s exclusive agricultural district planning map set the spirit and procedure for all county planning work that followed.<sup>36</sup> Comprehensive planning maps for any particular planning area would block out in a general way the sub-areas best suited for residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural uses, thus avoiding the political overtones of the 1953 “sphere of influence” study. Then the planning staff would work with agricultural landowners

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<sup>34</sup> Letter to author from Abraam Krushkhov, December 14, 1982. In his major work, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful path to Real Reform* (1898), Ebenezer Howard proposed that England’s urban blight be remedied by building “new towns” or “garden cities” in the open countryside and then protecting them from cities and from one another by surrounding the “new towns” with agricultural greens.

<sup>35</sup> Krushkhov letter, December 14, 1982; author interview with Roy Cameron on July 13, 1982, at Saratoga, California (Cameron came to the Santa Clara County Planning Department as a senior planner in 1954. He moved up to associate planner in 1956 and then to director in 1967 when Karl Belser resigned. Cameron retired from his position and the department in 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Krushkhov letter, December 14, 1982.

who wanted zoning protection, and together they would draw up detailed maps for exclusive agricultural district designation.

Without question, exclusive agricultural zoning in Santa Clara County resulted from the collaborative efforts of Will Weston and Karl Belser. Weston, born in Oakland in 1884, lived his entire life in the Bay Area. In 1913, after graduating with a B.A. in economics from the University of California, Berkeley, he purchased his first pear orchard in Santa Clara County. Over the years he expanded his operation until, at one time, he owned and leased about 275 acres, known as Peraleda Ranch, which produced eight varieties of canning and shipping pears. Weston was not only a successful grower; he also was active in community affairs and local politics. He held memberships in several agricultural and grower organizations, both the Santa Clara City and the California State Chambers of Commerce, and the Commonwealth Club of California. An original appointee to the Santa Clara County Planning Commission, he was also a member of the San Francisco Bay Area Council during the late 1940s and early 1950s. His commercial orchard business, situated in a rapidly growing area, allowed him to witness firsthand the urban threat to agriculture; and his civic affiliations, especially with the Commonwealth Club and the San Francisco Bay Area Council, brought him into contact with then-current ideas and debates regarding land-use planning.<sup>37</sup> However the seed for agricultural zoning was planted, Weston's familiarity with zoning laws and procedures quickly convinced him that such tools could be used to farmers' advantage. He noted that zoning was used to keep residences from encroaching on industrial areas, and he "couldn't see why agricultural zoning shouldn't keep residences out too." Weston, in due time, proposed the idea to Karl Belser who, in turn, "took it up as a sort of prophet."<sup>38</sup>

Belser, unlike Weston, had no long-standing personal ties to the area and no apparent interest in agricultural land protection before coming to the Santa Clara County Planning Department in 1951. He graduated from the University of Michigan School of Architecture in 1925 and received

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<sup>37</sup> Letter to author from Nancy Perrin Weston, daughter of the late Will Weston, November 11, 1982; *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* 57 (1977): 420.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Burgess, "Originator of Greenbelting in SC County to Retire," *Daily Palo Alto Times*, May 1, 1959; Ronald Buel, "The Changing Land: Some Farmers Strive to Curb Urbanization, Not Sell to Developers," *Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 1966.

his Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard School of Design in 1927. After a short interval working in Boston as an architect, he accepted a teaching post in 1929 at the newly formed School of Architecture and Engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI), where he remained until 1941. In the mid-1930s, his interest began to drift toward planning, and in 1936 he took a sabbatical from VPI to study planning and the housing movement in Europe at the University of Zurich. He completed his studies by taking an extensive tour through Austria, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Belgium, Holland, France, and England, visiting several so-called new towns in England. After resigning his position at VPI in 1941, Belser adopted planning as a second career, and throughout the 1940s he held several positions: in 1942, he accepted a position as a planner for the City of Detroit; in 1944, he became a planner for the City of Los Angeles; during 1945, he was a member of the University of Oregon Bureau of Municipal Research; and, in 1946, he went back to teaching at the University of Oregon School of Architecture. In 1951, he took a sabbatical from the University of Oregon to accept a position as senior planner with the Santa Clara Planning Department. When he became department director in 1952, he left his teaching career forever. Belser remained director of the Planning Department until he resigned in December 1966 to become deputy director of a United Nations special housing development project.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it appears that Belser's ideas regarding agricultural land protection did not come so much from theory as from an inventive mind enhanced by years of study and experience in both architecture and planning. His ideas were, as a colleague has phrased it, "a spontaneous, creative response to a real-life situation — where we could all see the county and city governments permitting the thoughtless destruction of prime agricultural land on almost a daily basis."<sup>40</sup>

The exclusive agricultural zoning ordinance may have been the brainchild of a few well-placed individuals, but it would have died quietly if other agricultural landowners had not requested zoning protection under its provisions. It may be helpful, therefore, to determine which farmers welcomed and which opposed exclusive agricultural zoning. Statistical evidence indicates that from

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<sup>39</sup> Letter to author from Wilma Belser, wife of the late Karl Belser, November 27, 1982.

<sup>40</sup> Krushkhov letter, December 14, 1982.

1948 through 1954, the orchards most likely to be converted to urban uses were those planted in apricots and prunes. Not coincidentally, these crops also generated the lowest income during those seven years. Orchard crops with a higher rate of return, namely pears and cherries, tended to remain in production. Aging pear and cherry orchards also were more likely to be replanted, while older apricot and prune orchards tended to be sold as the end of their bearing lives approached. Farm size also appears to have influenced farmers' decisions to sell, since farms that ranged in size from ten to twenty-nine acres "tended to be displaced first." Thus, smaller-acreage landowners, particularly those who had planted orchards of apricots and prunes, could not generally afford to continue farming once property taxes began to rise.<sup>41</sup>

Ray Benech similarly recalls that "the people who sold out the fastest were the real, true farmers," that is to say, "the small farmer who had twenty acres and worked it all himself." Small farmers in Santa Clara County, Benech explains, "sold out for \$1,500 an acre here, and they went up to Yuba City and they bought for \$500 an acre. They got three acres for one, and they ran like hell because their orchards were getting old."<sup>42</sup>

Census data on Santa Clara County farm size in relation to farm income generally support Benech's perception (see Table 4). There are no relevant data prior to 1954, but the figures for 1954 to 1964 show that the percentage of part-time and low-income-producing commercial farms to the total number of farms (column D) remained fairly constant throughout the decade. If one looks more closely at these figures, however, the decrease in the total number of farms from 4,953, in 1954, to 2,631, in 1964, represents a 46 percent drop, and the decrease in the total number of commercial farms from 3,875 to 1,888 represents a 51 percent drop, while the decrease in the number of low-income-producing commercial farms from 699 to 210 represents a 70 percent drop. Moreover, during the same time, the low-income-producing commercial farms, as a percentage of all commercial farms, fell substantially from 18 percent in 1954 to 8 percent in 1959.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, then, farmers struggling to

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<sup>41</sup> Jack Lessinger, "The Determination of Land Use in Rural-Urban Transition Areas: A Case Study in Northern Santa Clara Valley, California" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1956), 168-171, 189, 206-208, 211-221.

<sup>42</sup> Benech interview.

<sup>43</sup> The rise to 11.1 percent in 1964 is likely attributable to a change in the way the Bureau of the Census defined commercial farms in 1964.

make ends meet were abandoning farming in Santa Clara County at a higher rate than others.<sup>44</sup>

TABLE 4. FARM SIZE IN RELATION TO VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD SANTA CLARA COUNTY, 1945–1964

(A)		Commercial Farms (B)		(C)	(D)
Year	Total Number	Total Number	Low Income (LI)	Part-time Farms (PT)	LI & PT Farms as a % of (A)
1945	5,914	4,307	—	(1380)	(23.0)
1950	5,282	3,888	—	—	—
1954	2,953	3,875	699	580	25.8
1959	3,354	2,421	197	673	26.0
1964	2,631	1,888	210	490	26.6

(A) A farm has been variously defined by the Bureau of the Census. Generally speaking, however, a farm is defined as land in parcels of three or more acres on which some agricultural operation is performed. The value of farm products must equal or exceed some nominal dollar amount: \$150 in 1950 and 1954, \$250 in 1959 and 1964.

(B) A commercial farm also has been variously defined. The major difference between a farm and a commercial farm is the value of products: in 1945, \$1,000 or more; in 1949, 1954, and 1959, \$1,200 or more; and in 1964, \$2,500 or more. A low-income-producing commercial farm is one on which the value of products is less but constitutes the major source of income, where the operator works fewer than 100 days off the farm.

(C) Part-time farms constituted a new category in 1954. Generally speaking, a part-time farm is defined as one where the operator works 100 days or more off the farm and whose nonfarm income is greater than the value of farm products.

The 1945 figure in parentheses is the number of farms where the operator simply worked off the farm for 100 days or more — a category abandoned after that year. The number of part-time farmers would be fewer than 1,380, but the percentage figure (23.0) suggests that it fairly represents the number of part-time and low-income commercial farms in 1945.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, County and City Data Book, 1949, 1952, 1956, 1962, 1967.

<sup>44</sup> How many and which of these farmers were selling farmland in Santa Clara County and buying farmland elsewhere is impossible to determine.

Some might view as ideal a lifestyle that meant a job in the city with a home in the country. Economically speaking, however, those living in this manner were living on the margin. Ray Benech might remember them as the “true farmers,” but even he admits, “[y]ou could never make a good living off a small acreage. In the ’thirties and ’forties everybody who had twenty acres or less had another job.” When land values began to climb in the early 1950s, smaller owner-operators therefore began to sell in order to improve their financial status, leaving their counterparts in an even more precarious situation. If their orchards were older, they were forced either to follow their predecessors and sell out at the first good opportunity or divert their aging orchards into crops that would supply a quick return on investment. Berries and flowers filled the gap, for both were in demand by a nearby growing urban market. Statistics of land-use conversion in the county reveal that, in the five years from 1949 to 1954, the number of acres in orchards of all types decreased by 15,561, vineyards by 2,249 acres, and vegetable crops by 7,971 acres. During the same five years, however, the number of acres planted in berries actually increased by 1,304 acres, field crops other than vegetables by 6,930, and nursery stock by 565 acres.<sup>45</sup>

If those people who really wanted to farm were leaving the area, then who stayed behind to fight for agricultural land preservation and why? According to Benech, those farmers most in favor of agricultural zoning in the 1950s were “the larger landholders, the people that were a little more wealthy and could afford to keep their land.” The fact that these people “held out,” however, “didn’t make them more pristine farmers,” as some non-farmer land conservation advocates have portrayed them. “It’s just that they were financially able to hold onto their land, and they could see the value of the land.”<sup>46</sup>

Without question, the greatest number of acres (79,864) placed under exclusive agricultural zoning during the 1950s was in the hands of very large landowners, although most of these larger parcels were zoned for exclusive agricultural use in 1956 or later.<sup>47</sup> However, almost half of the farm operators who

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<sup>45</sup> Benech interview; George Goodrich Mader, “Planning for Agriculture in Urbanizing Areas: A Case Study of Santa Clara County, California” (M.C.P. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1956), 73.

<sup>46</sup> Benech interview.

<sup>47</sup> Robert W. Travis, “The Use of Greenbelt Theory in Santa Clara County” (San Jose State University: Real Estate Research Bureau, April 30, 1962), 24.

requested exclusive agricultural zoning from April 1954 to June 1961 owned 100 or fewer acres (see Table 5). Of the 3,856 acres in actual or proposed greenbelts by 1956, two years after the ordinance took effect, 1,756 acres were planted in pear or cherry orchards; only 210 acres were planted in apricot or prune orchards. The other 1,900 acres were, for the most part, devoted to poultry ranching.<sup>48</sup>

TABLE 5. NUMBER AND PERCENT OF ZONING ACTIONS AND ACREAGE ZONED FOR EXCLUSIVE AGRICULTURAL USE BY SIZE OF AREA ZONED PER ACTION, SANTA CLARA COUNTY, APRIL 1950 – JUNE 1961

Number of Acres per Zoning Action	Zoning Actions		Acreage Zoned	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Fewer than 10	26	15.66	148	0.16
10–19	23	13.86	307	0.32
20–49	28	16.87	906	0.95
50–99	16	9.64	1,185	1.24
100–249	31	18.67	4,841	5.06
250–499	13	7.83	4,662	4.87
500–999	8	4.82	4,693	4.91
1000 and over	18	12.65	78,864	82.49
<b>Total</b>	166	100.00	95,606	100.00

Compiled by Robert W. Travis, "The Use of Greenbelt Theory in Santa Clara County," (San Jose State University: Real Estate Research Bureau, April 30, 1962), 24.

Nevertheless, in a county where the average farm was less than 150 acres, and many were much smaller than that, a large farm, in locally relative terms, was not necessarily vast. Will Weston was, according to local criteria, among the larger landholders. In 1945, the average farm size was 123 acres, a figure that held fairly constant until 1959, when the average farm size jumped to 158 acres. The sudden rise corresponds, moreover, to

<sup>48</sup> Mader, 76.

a decrease in the number of small farms. In 1954 there were 4,953 farms in the county; by 1959, there were only 3,345, a decrease of 1,608 farms. Of those 1,608 farms lost, 583 were farms of ten or fewer acres.<sup>49</sup> If the county had remained predominantly rural during the 1950s, one would attribute this decrease in numbers and increase in average size to farm consolidation. Given the circumstances, however, the increased average size is more plausibly the result of fewer ten-acre farms to figure into the average.

The evidence suggests that growers, especially pear and cherry growers, who enjoyed a favorable market for their crops in the 1950s, sought to protect their land and agricultural investments. These were, in addition, farmers with land located closer to expanding urban areas. They were, for all intents and purposes, urban landowners. It seems quite natural, then, that they turned to an urban land-use tool, zoning, to protect their investments. In so doing, they were acting no differently from other urban landowners who sought to protect the value of their residential, commercial, or industrial properties with zoning to exclude incompatible land uses. Later, after state legislation upheld the county's exclusive agricultural zoning ordinance, and other state legislation proposed to couple agricultural zoning with preferential tax assessment, owners of much larger farms and ranches situated farther from the urban fringe began to petition the planning commission for inclusion in exclusive agricultural districts. At the outset, however, exclusive agricultural zoning appealed primarily to agricultural landowners with modest but profitable operations, who saw its chief benefit to be a means of preventing municipal growth from engulfing their farms and orchards.

## GREEN GOLD: PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION

The chance collaboration between Weston and Belser is remarkable, considering that in 1950 the Santa Clara County Planning Commission was, like most county planning commissions, a moribund institution. Established in 1929, the commission carried a mandate "to make and adopt subject to the provision of law, a master plan for the physical development of

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<sup>49</sup> Bureau of the Census, *City and County Data Book*, 1949, 1952, 1956, 1962, 1967.

the county.”<sup>50</sup> The master plan, however, did not emerge until the 1950s, and it was developed principally under Karl Belser’s directorship. In the 1930s and 1940s the planning commission did little more than pass broad zoning ordinances, rubberstamp requests for zoning variances, and sponsor an annual barbeque attended by local businessmen and politicians. Will Weston himself once summed up the early days of the planning commission by stating that. “There were days when we’d get through the business in half an hour, and Oscar [Campbell, another commissioner] would get out his movie projector and give us a film show.”<sup>51</sup> The Santa Clara Valley Water Conservation District, also established in 1929, undertook all study and planning for water development and conservation in the county during the 1930s and 1940s. And the San Jose Chamber of Commerce took the lead in planning for industrial development in the 1940s. In fact, when Industrial Survey Associates made its economic survey for the San Jose Chamber of Commerce in the late 1940s, it sought assistance not from the county planning commission or planning department, but from the state planning office.<sup>52</sup>

A quasi-public committee attempted to inaugurate comprehensive planning in the 1940s, but county planners took no part in their activities. The Citizens’ Planning Council of Greater San Jose was created in 1942 when a local clergyman, Stephen C. Peabody, proposed to the San Jose Coordinating Committee — a five-member group comprising the city manager, the superintendent of schools, the community chest executive, the probation officer, and the chairperson of the city recreation committee — that “a self-survey of the many functions and activities taking place in San Jose” be undertaken so as to “draw a picture of the possible future life of this community, especially its economic outlook.” Peabody’s proposal led the coordinating committee to create an organization for the purpose of carrying out this community self-study. Under the executive directorship of planner Mel Scott and a volunteer lay and professional

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<sup>50</sup> Copy of 1929 ordinance in SCCo Plan Dept, Data and Information: Administration, Boards and Commission.

<sup>51</sup> Burgess, *Daily Palo Alto Times*, May 1, 1959.

<sup>52</sup> California History Center, *Water in the Santa Clara Valley*, passim; “San Jose and Santa Clara County: An Industrial Survey,” see front cover and letter of transmittal.

staff, the Citizens' Planning Council conducted, from 1943 to mid-1945, studies of family welfare, juvenile delinquency, neighborhood planning, public health and medical care, off-street parking, library services, historic landmarks, community education, race relations, county government, and agriculture. *Foresight*, a bimonthly publication highlighting the council's work, circulated throughout the state as well as the local area.<sup>53</sup>

As the council's name implied, its research focused on the City of San Jose; however, several studies covered the entire county. This was particularly true of the agriculture study, which "brought together for the first time much valuable information on farm holdings and conservation problems" to form the data base for a countywide soil conservation plan. The agriculture committee report is interesting for two additional reasons: first, the committee, reporting in 1945, foresaw the land-use conversion about to take place in the north county and predicted accurately that "a considerable amount will be subdivided into small residential type holdings." But the committee, like Industrial Survey Associates, inaccurately predicted that residential development would not impair agriculture. The committee even suggested the construction of "a scenic drive through the mountains surrounding the valley . . . and an annual blossom festival" to celebrate the valley's springtime beauty."<sup>54</sup>

During the 1930s and 1940s, county planning officials simply did very little planning. This is not to imply that Santa Clara County was unusual; few county planning commissions actively engaged in planning until the 1950s. While the record is sketchy, it nevertheless suggests a commission and department prepared to follow rather than monitor or challenge city growth, react to rather than plan for urban development. This continued to be the commission's general point of view through the 1950s. Roy Cameron, who joined the department in 1954 and served as its director from 1967 to 1979, states, "The county never at any time wanted to get into the development business. . . . They didn't look upon themselves as a competitor with cities in terms of zoning land." Until the late 1950s, planning commissioners served indefinite terms at the discretion of the Board of

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<sup>53</sup> Citizens' Planning Council of Greater San Jose, "A Statement of the Origin of the Planning Council of Greater San Jose" (mimeographed report, San Jose, 1946), n.p.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, see "Summary Report of the Committee on Agriculture" contained therein, n.p.

Supervisors, which displayed no tendency to appoint new commissioners at regular intervals. As a result, two of the original commissioners, Will Weston and W.W. Curtner, both ranchers, served terms of almost thirty years. Longevity gave them control of the commission, and the commission catered to agricultural interests throughout the 1950s.<sup>55</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain precisely why the commission took such a lackadaisical approach to planning in the 1930s and 1940s, but an excerpt from a letter that Weston wrote to fellow commissioner Oscar Campbell in 1948 provides a clue. In response to a San Francisco Bay Area Council proposal to include Santa Clara County in the San Francisco metropolitan area for 1950 census purposes, Weston responded negatively, writing to Campbell that Santa Clara County was “sufficiently hinterland to have a provincial center.”<sup>56</sup> He thus voiced a fear common among local government officials: that planning meant, for outlying areas, accommodating the needs and desires of the City of San Francisco. One can only assume that Santa Clara County commissioners considered their local responsibilities to be administrative in nature, implementing state planning law insofar as they were able or inclined to do. Planning was an activity largely centered in urban areas where there was a perceived need to plan for housing, transportation, or sanitation; and county officials felt obliged to remain informed about city, or regional, planning only so that they were not surprised by unanticipated events.

When Karl Belser assumed charge of the Planning Department in 1952, he hired a staff whose achievements gained the department nationwide recognition. William H. Whyte, for instance, considered the department’s efforts to establish exclusive agricultural zoning as well as its plans for a continuous chain of creekside parks to be among the best examples of open space planning in the United States.<sup>57</sup> Belser, in addition, maintained a constant outreach program, speaking on behalf of regional and state planning at state and national professional meetings, testifying at

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<sup>55</sup> Cameron Interview; SCCo Plan Dept, Data and Information: Boards and Commission—Planning Commission, Memberships, 1930–1964.

<sup>56</sup> Letter dated April 29, 1948, from Will Weston to Oscar Campbell, SCCo Plan Dept, Improvement and Development: San Francisco Bay Area Council.

<sup>57</sup> Letter dated January 29, 1968, from William H. Whyte to Roy Cameron, SCCo Plan Dept, Improvement and Development: Conservation, Open Space.

state legislative hearings, and occasionally writing articles on land use and agricultural land preservation in Santa Clara County. In the 1940s, the department produced only one planning study (of county sewage and industrial waste disposal sites), but between 1953 and 1960, the year the county general plan was adopted, Belser and his staff undertook nearly thirty planning studies, surveys, or analyses.<sup>58</sup>

Comprehensive plans that included recommendations for agricultural land protection were based on a philosophy, developed by Belser, which equated the best farmland with natural resources protected by national forests and parks. Fertile agricultural land should be conserved and used wisely to meet future food needs. *Green Gold*, a 1958 departmental publication, most clearly expressed his philosophy. It advocated that the federal government or the individual states create “permanent agricultural reserves” to protect “priceless resource[s]” from “suburban scatteration” which threatened in many areas “to become endless, monotonous megalopolis.”<sup>59</sup> This philosophy harkened back to the New Deal, when the federal government purchased over eleven million acres of privately owned, marginally productive land and placed its management in the hands of various federal and state agencies. It also echoed the tenets of the 1920s Regional Planning Association of America as well as Howard’s turn-of-the-century garden city concept.

However, the Santa Clara County greenbelt plans developed under Belser’s direction also represented a practicable response to contemporary problems. They reveal that, as far as agricultural land was concerned, county planners were willing to sacrifice northern and western areas to industrialization and urban growth. Planners concentrated their efforts to protect agricultural land in the southern and eastern areas of the county. These were much less densely settled areas where they had some chance of educating the public about the benefits of planning before urban growth

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<sup>58</sup> Information gathered from a lengthy examination of the holdings in the SCCo Plan Dept library, July 1982.

<sup>59</sup> SCCo Plan Dept, *Green Gold*, 1958, n.p. Krushkhov notes (January 27, 1983) that when he was on the planning staff (1952–1956), “Leland Wilcox (deceased) — a friend of Karl Belser’s from Oregon — wrote nearly every planning report in the office and gave faithful expression to Belser’s philosophy and ideas.”

created chaos and a sensitive political climate that would render comprehensive planning impossible.

In June 1956, the department presented the Eastside Interim General Plan with the hope that its implementation would conserve twenty-three miles of the best agricultural land on the valley floor by dispersing some of the expected population increase to thirty-three square miles of foothill land in the Diablo Range. Since the area was already under an interim zoning ordinance, and because a 1955 land-use study indicated that soil conditions, crop yields, and farmer attitudes made exclusive agricultural zoning feasible for an extensive area, planners had reason to be optimistic. The plan appeared to forestall municipal annexation into the area for several years, but only because San Jose was expanding west and north during the 1950s. When San Jose began, in the 1960s, to seek more land to the east for urban uses, farmers on the Eastside began to sell out.<sup>60</sup> By the early 1980s, the twenty-three square miles recommended for intensive agricultural use in 1956 had either been developed or was vacant, awaiting development.

The natural landscape gave planners even greater cause to be optimistic about guiding development and preserving agricultural tracts in the area known locally as South County, which is geographically separated from the North County by a narrowing of the valley floor. County planners consequently spent much time and energy developing a plan that would concentrate commercial, industrial, and residential growth around existing governmental centers. These, in turn, were to be separated and surrounded by wide swaths of agricultural and recreational greenbelts, intended both to maintain a critical mass of land for sustaining the agricultural industry and to lend autonomy and identity to area towns.<sup>61</sup> South County municipal officials initially reacted favorably to the plan, which Clarence S. Stein, a founding member of the Regional Planning Association, praised as both “practical” and “imaginative” because it proposed a

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<sup>60</sup> SCCo Plan Dept, *Eastside Interim General Plan*, June, 1956, n.p.; Robert N. Young, “Feasibility of Conservation of Agricultural Land in the Berryessa Area” (report to Planning Department), October 6, 1955; Cameron interview.

<sup>61</sup> SCCo Plan Dept, *Roadside Towns Become a Greenbelt City: A Preliminary Plan for South Santa Clara County*, 1957; Planning Research Associates in cooperation with the Planning Department, “South Santa Clara County: A Physical and Economic Survey,” December 15, 1957.

“new type” of greenbelt concept: a “constellation” of urban centers “united as part of a regional complex,” integrated into the existing agricultural landscape and economy rather than “separate towns protected by a green surrounding open area.”<sup>62</sup>

Hoping to avoid the political repercussions of the 1953 “sphere of influence” study, the County Planning Department courted voluntary cooperation from South County residents. To persuade landowners as well as government officials to embrace the “greenbelt city” idea, as it was called, the Planning Department made fifteen presentations of the plan as it evolved. From January through October 1957, Belser and/or his staff appeared before civic organizations, city councils, town hall meetings, and farm groups in an effort to foster understanding of and support for their development guidelines. By November 1957, they achieved some measure of success when the city councils of Gilroy and Morgan Hill approved the preliminary plan. In addition, the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau and “certain agriculturalists in the Gilroy–Morgan Hill area” appeared in support of the preliminary plan at the second public hearing, held in December 1957.<sup>63</sup>

Downtown business people were happy to support the plan because it would continue to channel commercial development toward established municipal centers. Likewise, civic organizations generally supported the plan because sufficient land was targeted for industrial and residential growth. But residents already settled in the unincorporated areas of the South County quickly dashed planners’ hopes for implementation. At issue was an area proposed for agricultural use, known as the Machado Greenbelt, near the town of Morgan Hill. Several owners of small parcels in the proposed greenbelt requested that their properties be excluded. When the preliminary plan was unveiled in 1957, however, the parcels were shown as included in the greenbelt. This provoked an angry response from twenty-seven property owners who reiterated their earlier protest at the December

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<sup>62</sup> Letter dated October 5, 1957, from Clarence S. Stein, FAIA, to Karl Belser, SCCO Plan Dept, Improvement and Development: Planning, South County Study.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum on “South County Plan—Chronology of Events,” dated December 18, 1957, from Robert N. Young, associate planner, to Karl Belser, and Minutes of December 4, 1957, public hearing, both SCCO Plan Dept, Improvement and Development: Planning, South County General Plan.

1957 public hearing and petitioned the county planning commission to have their properties excluded. The commission ignored their petition and adopted the plan as it appeared in its preliminary form; and the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to adopt the plan in January 1958.<sup>64</sup> Outraged, the heretofore informally organized property owners adopted the name “South El Camino Development Association,” and membership grew to thirty-three. A written protest from the association asserted that its members were “entitled to commercial development along South El Camino Real [aka Monterey Highway] just as the El Camino Real enjoyed in North County when it developed.” The association further charged that the town of Morgan Hill had “absolutely no right, or power, to speak for us who live and operate in the unincorporated area,” and it vowed that it would “fight to collect just compensation for any move which deprives us of our rights as taxpayers, citizens, and property owners.”<sup>65</sup>

The confrontation between would-be land speculators and county planners augured the fate of South County greenbelt planning and revealed, moreover, the complex situation that generally thwarted planning for balanced growth. The Santa Clara County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors were willing to provide exclusive agricultural zoning for landowners who desired such protection, but the planning commission steadfastly viewed its role in farmland conservation matters as strictly advisory. Therefore, even though Belser and his staff took the initiative to design areawide plans based on an overarching concept of using agricultural preserves to achieve balanced growth and to maintain a diversified local economy, the Planning Department’s official function was only to provide expert advice. Planners’ professional qualifications lent authority to the guidelines the department mapped out; and Belser, acting on personal conviction, also became the chief political advocate for greenbelt planning. Implementation, however, depended completely on cooperation from city officials with considerable support from local citizens. State law

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<sup>64</sup> Minutes of December 4, 1957, public hearing; Petition dated October 21, 1957, to Santa Clara County Planning Commission, both SCCo Plan Dept, Improvement and Development; Planning, South Santa Clara General Plan.

<sup>65</sup> Petition dated August 9, 1959, from South El Camino Development Association to Santa Clara County Planning Department, SCCo Plan Dept, Improvement and Development; Planning, South Santa Clara County General Plan.

gave county supervisors the authority to frame land-use plans for unincorporated areas, but state law did not correspondingly require municipalities to recognize those plans. It is not surprising, given these circumstances, that the South County plan met the same fate as the Eastside plan. By the mid-1980s, South County open land was almost entirely in the hands of developers or speculators.

The Santa Clara County story might never have echoed in the legislative chambers of the State Capitol if county planners and a handful of growers had relied on citizens' good will to accomplish the task of preserving agricultural land. At the same time the county's exclusive agricultural zoning ordinance was drafted, however, plans were also laid for a state legislative effort. Roy Cameron explains that since "there was no political body that had the ability to control growth then," the only alternative "was to go to the state legislature." During 1954, the Planning Department devoted considerable time and effort to prepare for the State Assembly a report on the status of city and county planning in California. The report spotlighted the problems and proposed solutions for several areas of the state where urban growth had created planning chaos.<sup>66</sup>

Karl Belser also worked with Ken Wilhelm, executive secretary for the Santa Clara Farm Bureau, to devise a legislative plan. Bruce F. Allen recalls that Wilhelm suggested to him that a state law be written to require cities to obtain owner consent to annex land zoned for exclusive agricultural use. Allen introduced, during the 1953 session, a number of bills designed in some way "to curb hostile annexations," but his first bills "were defeated by opposition of the League of California Cities." In 1955, however, he introduced the bill that became known as the Greenbelt Act, one of over sixty annexation-related bills proposed during the legislative session. The original bill would have restricted cities throughout the state from annexing lands zoned for exclusive agricultural use, but amendments made in the Assembly allowed implementation only in those counties that had, as of December 31, 1954, adopted master land-use plans that included an

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<sup>66</sup> Cameron interview; California, Assembly, Interim Committee on Conservation, Planning, and Public Works, *Planning for Growth: A Report on the Status of City and County Planning in California*, January 1955.

exclusive agricultural zone classification. An additional amendment provided the bill would expire in two years.<sup>67</sup>

Although the bill encountered local opposition from the City of San Jose and the *Mercury*, Allen says that he received “unanticipated help from legislators from metropolitan areas” representing constituents who “simply desired the niceties of open space preservation.” This unexpected support from urban areas got the bill through the Assembly, though not unamended; and it easily passed through the rural-dominated Senate. A series of favorable front-page articles in the *San Francisco Examiner*, moreover, aroused public attention and helped to create sufficient popular support for Governor Goodwin Knight to sign the bill. By 1957, the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau was fully behind the Greenbelt Act and lobbied for its extension. Cameron recalls that the 1955 law was “the number one piece of legislation that Karl, Ken Wilhelm, and other members of the Farm Bureau, pushed.”<sup>68</sup>

The 1955 Greenbelt Act marked the point at which agricultural land conservation achieved legislative recognition as an issue of statewide importance; but once the battle for agricultural zoning reached the state level, the fragile planner–farmer coalition, which existed on the county level, fell apart. Those who preferred to define the American Dream as a suburban

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<sup>67</sup> Reference to a “task force” report prepared by Wilhelm and Belser appears in Will Stevens, “Unofficial Figures Indicate Loss of State’s Farming Area to New Housing Subdivisions,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 23, 1955, reprinted in *Examiner* leaflet entitled *The Big Push*; letter to author from Judge Bruce F. Allen, dated August 19, 1982; *California Statutes*, 1955, Chapter 1712; Governor’s Chaptered Bill File, Chapter 1712, 1955 (California State Archives), indicates that Governor Goodwin J. Knight received letters concerning Allen’s bill (AB 2166) from the State Board of Equalization, the State Department of Public Works, the County Board of Supervisors Association, the League of California Cities, the State Bar of California, the State Chamber of Commerce, Mather Agricultural Council, as well as from assessors, tax collectors, and taxpayer groups. The letters, however, are not in the file, nor does file notation indicate which groups supported and which opposed the bill. The expurgated record can only be offered as evidence that the bill had strong opponents and supporters, as former Assemblyman Allen has stated.

<sup>68</sup> Stevens, *The Big Push*; Allen letter; copy of resolution dated November 2, 1956, from Wilton Stine, Santa Clara County Farm Bureau, to California Farm Bureau Federation in California, Assembly, Interim Committee Reports, 1955–1957, *State Greenbelt Legislation and the Problem of Urban Encroachment in California Agriculture* 13, no. 14 (May 1957): 45–50; Cameron interview.

tract home or a franchise operation in a strip shopping mall were formidable opponents once they found implicit allies in those who preferred to define a farm in terms of retirement income, or its potential for capital gains. Both contingents flatly rejected the vision of the future — urban centers surrounded by agricultural greens — proffered in the Eastside and South County plans. Many valley residents came to consider the Planning Department's greatest achievement to be the transportation network it designed in the 1950s, a maze of expressways connecting the North County traffic concatenation to the state and intercontinental freeways that criss-cross the county. It is perverse irony that, in the mid-1970s, Marriott's Great America, the Bay Area equivalent of Disneyland, occupied land that Will Weston once planted in pear orchards.

The tenuous Santa Clara County coalition nonetheless led the fight to preserve agricultural land and rural community identities by coupling greenbelt theory with planners' chief tool, zoning. Once the land conservation issue reached Sacramento, they held the "Valley of the Heart's Delight" aloft as an example of what lay ahead for rural California. As Karl Belser stated before an Assembly subcommittee meeting in San Jose in November, 1956: "Our county is but a microcosm of the State."<sup>69</sup> Santa Clara Valley's name was to be invoked many times during the next decade as state legislators struggled to devise a program of agricultural land conservation that was acceptable to both rural and urban interests.

Ultimately the state-level debate shifted from planning for urban growth balanced against agricultural concerns to issues of property taxation. Closer examination of that shift reveals, however, that the 1955 Greenbelt Act challenged a long-standing but legally vague tradition of home rule in California. From roughly the turn of the twentieth century, a loose home rule principle had shaped a state-local alliance which gave local governments powers and responsibilities that ultimately brought counties and cities into conflict. State-sanctioned land-use regulations in rural areas touched a sensitive political nerve: if agricultural land needed to be conserved (many doubted that it did), who should have control and through what legal channels should controls be manifest?

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<sup>69</sup> California, Assembly, *State Greenbelt Legislation*, 30.