

## **Napa County can benefit from PUC land development**

October 9, 2012 [Tom Thurlow](#)

Owning property in California can be a hassle. There are property taxes, upkeep and insurance costs, just to name a few.

Fortunately you can always do something with your property to make the hassle worth it, right? Try telling that to Pacific Union College (PUC), which owns 2,000 acres of land in unincorporated Angwin, and now faces a Napa County ballot measure to strip away most of its property rights for its most valuable parcels.

Measure U is on the Nov. 6 ballot for Napa County voters, and it is the culmination of an antagonistic history between the college and its Angwin neighbors over PUC's dreams of developing some vacant land. The measure needs to be defeated.

It all started a few years ago, when PUC proposed developing small parts of its land into shops, restaurants, professional offices, a sheriff sub-station, retirement home, hotel, some open space for farmer's markets, and 800 to 1,000 houses.

Anticipating objections, PUC called the development "Ecovillage," and filled a website with pastoral drawings and descriptions that contained every politically correct, green "sustainable" cliché in the book.

Picture a cross between Yountville and a 1960s hippie commune. PUC even agreed to declare other parts of its land off-limits to any future development.

Who could object to something called Ecovillage? Sections of PUC land were going to be locally farmed and 15 percent of the houses built would be reserved for low-income families.

And instead of having to drive 25 miles to Whole Foods in Napa, local Angwin people could overpay for their produce right there in town.

The locals were having none of it. The group Save Rural Angwin began its role of loyal opposition, speaking out at meetings and writing letters to the editor.

PUC reduced the number of proposed houses to 380, then to 215, but the opposition only grew. In October of 2010, PUC threw in the hemp towel and called off the whole proposal.

But some of the land in question is still zoned residential, and PUC still has a permit application before the Planning Commission to build 191 houses, and 600 acres are for sale.

Measure U is being marketed as an attempt to “preserve agricultural land,” but the measure is really a proposal to take away PUC’s property rights by re-zoning several of its parcels as agricultural and to disallow the subdivision of educational lands in all unincorporated parts of Napa County.

Of course, property tax and other expenses would stay with Pacific Union College.

If it seems strange to have a county-wide ballot measure targeting the lands owned by a single land-owner, it is. “Down-zoning” decisions are made by the Board of Supervisors all the time, giving both sides a chance to make their case with the supervisors. Not so with Measure U.

Besides the unfairness, and the tyranny-of-the-majority of the measure, there are issues for some locals (like me) who would like some commercial development in Angwin.

We in Pope Valley would love to shop locally, and are tired of having to drive to Lake County to overpay for produce or buy highly-sugared coffee drinks.

And what about the students of Pacific Union College? Shopping is great stress reliever, you know. Who can forget the soothing background music in the movie “Clueless” when Alicia Silverstone’s character found sanctuary in the local shopping mall?

Napa County also stands to make some sales and property tax money from developments at PUC. Right now our roads need repair, and county employees have waited years for a cost of living adjustment, getting one this year of only 1.5 percent.

The only part of Measure U that doesn’t specifically target Pacific Union College is the part that prohibits schools in unincorporated Napa County from subdividing their land.

Is that even an issue outside of Angwin? What if another school in unincorporated Napa County wanted to subdivide? If Measure U passes, that will be illegal.

For example, take Napa Valley College (NVC), which has its own fully-bonded winery, under the fearless leadership of Dr. Steve Krebs. If the NVC Winery ever wanted to buy some unincorporated land nearby to subdivide and expand, that would be illegal. Dr. Krebs would be conducting his office hours from behind bars.

Has prohibiting schools from subdividing ever worked in any other county? I could find no precedent for this, but I did find that Napa County’s impartial analysis of Measure U said that this part of the measure “likely conflicts with state law.”

This part of Measure U will probably need to be cleaned up by some other ballot measure years from now.

We need to vote “no” on Measure U. Instead of spending money on getting signatures and campaigning for this measure, its backers should try instead to just buy the land from PUC.

*Thurlow lives in Pope Valley.*