



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOIA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

“The most explosive season yet”

Well Chris Harrison’s tagline, taken from the television show *The Bachelor-ette*, really applies to the election this year, both at the national as well as the local level. In Los Altos, the battle lines appear to be drawn with a fat marker between the “pro development” and the “resident-centric group” (or as some who favor aggressive development might say, “anti-development”).

But this article isn’t to rehash what has already been published in newsletters, postcard mailers and local ads. It is to provide perspective. And in this case I am here to defend developers. Yep, defend them, or at least the good, the honest and the well-intended ones. And yes they do exist, for those of you who are skeptics. And to illustrate this point I am going to tell you a true story.

Meet my friend Jerry Moison. Jerry, up until he moved out of Los Altos to be closer to family, had lived in town for decades. He was a well-respected member of the community, participating in organizations such as Rotary and really interested in maintaining his town as a good place to live and work. Jerry was also a successful developer, having built and managed numerous commercial projects all over the US.

In 2009 Jerry joined the Planning and Transportation Commission. For those of us who had been on it for years, we had built an effective working group of commissioners with differing perspectives. But for many of us, we hadn’t previously had the experience of a commercial developer on the commission. How would he look at the commercial projects – would he vote in favor of commercial projects that did not appropriately balance commercial development needs versus those of residents and the greater community? Did he just join the commission so he could ingratiate himself with the City staff, Council and commissioners for future projects he might propose?

It didn’t take very many meetings to get a sense of Jerry. We were very pleasantly surprised. Jerry provided thoughtful input, at times scolding the developers who presented projects that were poorly thought out, were clearly economically unsustainable, lacked sufficient parking or did not provide enough benefit for the community. He told them unequivocally that by ignoring those issues, they would create a project that ultimately would fail and not provide the expected financial return. Jerry understood that some developers were shortsighted, but also appreciated that in the longer term everyone, developer and the community, would benefit from a well thought through project. Jerry provided all of us on the Planning Commission with valuable perspective and insights. And as a group it reinforced an important point – that good developers exist, that good projects can be designed and built.

The reality is that good development helps keep our town alive and vibrant. It is sort of like the homeowner who continues to maintain and improve his property. If done well it will increase the value of the home and neighborhood. If done poorly or not at all, it decreases values and makes the neighborhood look shabby. Jerry left the commission in 2017 and subsequently moved away from Los Altos, but I hope his perspective never leaves our town.

In the election battle that looms in Los Altos, it is important that we all remember we do need good developers and good projects. None of the City Council candidates FOLA interviewed were against development. They all want it. But keep in mind the lesson learned from Jerry – it is possible to be a good developer, make money and still retain the best interests of our town. And watch out for all the mud that is being thrown around this election season. Choose wisely when you vote over the next few weeks. Our town will be the better for it.

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