

# Billionaire-backed futuristic city no longer shrouded in secrecy. Here are the details.

source: Los Angeles Times

author: Jessica Garrison

date: Jan. 17, 2024

5 The tech billionaires who for years secretly amassed land on the fringe of San Francisco Bay announced Wednesday that they will begin gathering signatures for a ballot initiative in Solano County that would clear the way to build a city from scratch. The group, called California Forever, envisions a community with tens of thousands of new homes, along with crisp new parks, bike lanes, open space and a solar farm. The model city would be walkable, socioeconomically integrated and fueled by clean energy.

10 Ultimately, the backers were revealed as titans of the tech industry. LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, and Patrick and John Collison, who founded the payment-processing company Stripe, are among those who have invested in this idealistic vision of a bold new community that would help ease the state's housing shortage — and the project's profit potential.

15 But to get there, the backers will have to persuade Solano County voters to approve the sweeping endeavor. The first stage of that campaign took place on Wednesday, when Jan Sramek, chief executive of California Forever, took to a podium in the Veterans Hall in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta town of Rio Vista to pledge that the project would be a “great neighbor” to everyone in the county.

20 Sramek, a former Goldman Sachs trader, has said his vision for the city coalesced while he was on a fishing trip in the nearby delta. He and other speakers listed a long series of benefits that they say would result from raising a new city on a rolling expanse now dedicated to ranching and wind farms. Among them: a pledge to create at least 15,000 jobs (...).

25 Yet that is a long way off. If the ballot measure is approved, other government approvals would then be required. Environmental groups have signaled lawsuits are possible, which could tie up the matter in court. (...)

30 The Solano County chapter of the Sierra Club has come out against the project. “We don't think we need housing on agricultural land,” said Joe Feller, former chair of the Solano Group of the Sierra Club. Despite all their talk of idealized communities and being good neighbors, Feller said, what the backers of California Forever really want is “to make money.” State Sen. Bill Dodd (D-Napa), who represents the area, said he is not yet convinced of the project's feasibility. “They've certainly put plenty of money and time into their proposal, but there are still huge unresolved issues like traffic, and I'm not sold,” he said in a statement.

35 Outside the meeting hall, some residents waited for the media in the parking lot. They had not been allowed in, they said, but had major concerns, including whether such a project would generate dangerous traffic and sprawl<sup>1</sup>. Among them was Kathleen Threlfall, who carried a sign that said: “Not Invited.” Threlfall, who lives in her great-grandparents' house, said her family has been farming in the area for more than a century and was among those who refused to sell their land to the group  
40 pushing the new city.

45

---

<sup>1</sup>Sprawl : extension, spread.

Written comprehension

*(Questions follow text order)*

- 1) What is the nature of this document? Justify your answer.
- 2) Based on the elements given in the first paragraph, explain in your own words what California Forever's project is about.
- 3) Second paragraph: what are the two arguments used by California Forever to justify their project? Please explain using your own words.
- 4) How do California Forever's members plan to persuade voters that they will be “a great neighbor” (l.15) to them?
- 5) Sixth paragraph: what are the two reasons why environmental groups disapprove of the project? Please rephrase them, using your own words.
- 6) A major weak point in this project is mentioned twice: what is it, and how does it contradict the spirit of this project?
- 7) One of the residents considers that California Forever is “pushing the new city” (l.36). How do you understand that, and would you say this is true? Please justify your answer.

Written expression: answer question 1 **OR** 2. You should write **at least 150 words.**

1. Some say that green cities are possible, others think they are an absurd idea. In a world that is increasingly preoccupied with climate change, do you think it is advisable to build new cities? Please justify your point of view.
2. You are a resident of Solano County, California, near San Francisco. You write a letter to State Senator Bill Dodd explaining your doubts about OR your support for the California Forever project. Make sure you use clear and convincing arguments either way.