

Quay Valley new town project re-emerges in Kings County

By Lewis Griswold

The massive Quay Valley new town proposal in western Kings County is suddenly alive again after being left for dead at the start of the Great Recession.

Last week developer Quay Hays of Los Angeles submitted an application to the Kings County Planning Department seeking to rezone 7,500 acres of grazing land for housing and commercial development.

The proposed development straddles Interstate 5 north of the Kern County line halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

It calls for 25,000 dwelling units — homes and apartments — that would house 75,000 people, plus themed resort hotels and restaurants, a business park and university research park, restored wetland habitat, trails for nature walks and agriculture in a combination dubbed the “new ruralism” in a [preliminary plan](#) submitted to the county.

Hanford, the county seat, has a population of more than 55,000.

In drought-stricken California, a key unanswered question for Quay Valley is where its water will come from.

“We spend more time on that issue than any other,” Hays said, adding that some will come from the California Aqueduct. He’s in the process of determining demand and potential water sources, but says conservation and water reclamation will be essential parts of the plan.

“We’ll use half the water that typically would be used,” he said. “We don’t use water, we reuse it. Every drop will be cleaned and reused.”

The community would incorporate the latest in green technology, including electricity from solar panels and transportation that gets people out of their cars, Hays said.

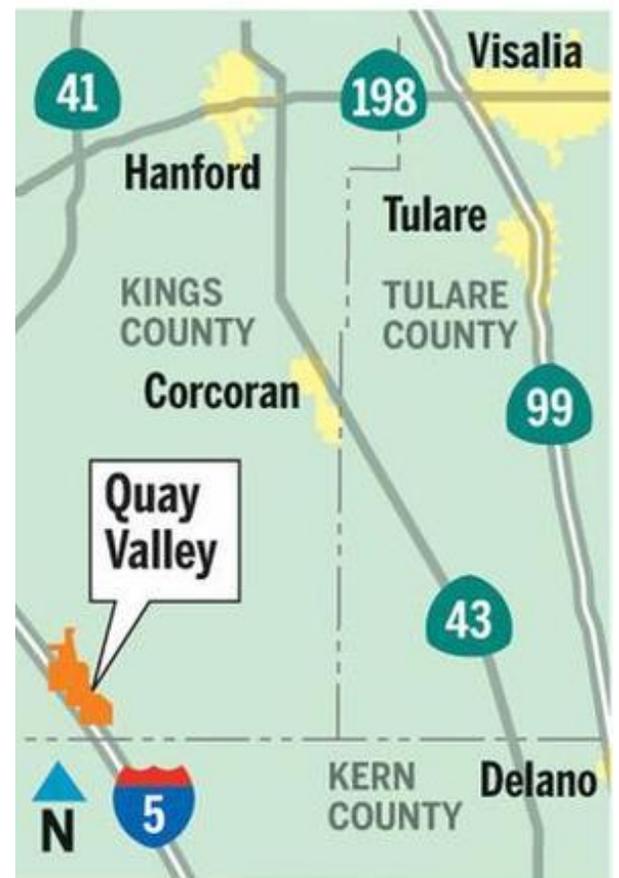
The zone change application by GROW Holdings LLC — GROW stands for green, renewable, organic and water — must go through the county’s “new community application and processing procedure” that was put in place five years ago, planning director Greg Gatzka said.

It’s unknown how long that would take, but the county has 30 days to determine if the application was filed correctly, Gatzka said.

If the county approves the project, it would take 15 to 20 years to fully build Quay Valley, with “a robust phase one

Quay Valley project

A Los Angeles-based development group is proposing to build 25,000 homes and apartments in a new town in Kings County.



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that has a balance of jobs and homes,” Hays said.

Quay Valley is one of several so-called “new towns” being proposed in the San Joaquin Valley. Others include Rio Mesa in Madera County, Yokohl Ranch in Tulare County, and a Tejon Ranch project in Kern County. The Millerton new town project in Fresno County on 2,000 acres has been approved, but is tied up in litigation.

Critics say new town proposals are designed to enrich property owners.

“Fundamentally, it’s a speculative venture,” said independent city planner Greg Collins of Visalia. “You control a large parcel that you didn’t pay a lot for and you attempt to get the property rezoned and approved for something more intensive. You have substantially increased the value of property.”

Former Fresno City Manager Mark Scott, who raised the ire of developers when he questioned whether growth pays for itself, said new town projects constitute sprawl.

“It’s insanity,” he said. “I don’t think it makes any sense from a land-use standpoint to have new cities popping up that aren’t connected to city infrastructure.”

But Kings County Supervisor Richard Valle, whose district includes the area, said he supports the project.

“I’m pro-development,” Valle said. “I’m willing to support him or anyone willing to invest in Kings County” because of the jobs that would be created.

Questions about water supply, air pollution and other issues will be addressed in the environmental impact report, he noted.

The Quay Valley project was first proposed with a larger footprint and twice as many homes.

It was revived because market conditions are improved, the state’s population is growing and the public is more knowledgeable about and accepting of the kind of green technologies he’s proposing, Hays said.

“When I started this project, people’s eyes would glaze over,” he said. “There’s been a major shift.”

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