

Opinion: Developing dialogue on solution for Naples
[Send a Letter to the Editor](#)

Voice From Santa Barbara: Jeff Phillips

April 9, 2006 7:39 AM

I recently attended both the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors and the Santa Barbara City Council hearings on the transferable development rights (TDR) study for the Naples property on the Gaviota coast. The study was done as part of the environmental impact report for development of the property.

The TDR study analyzes the feasibility of transferring the development rights of a 52-home development project proposed on an area known as Naples along the Gaviota coast to urban areas -- that is, areas more suitable for development. This TDR solution seeks to relocate development using market forces in a manner that respects private property rights and the economic interests of Gaviota landowners; those who are interested should visit the county Web site to see the study.

A transferable development rights program uses up-zonings within urban boundaries (purchased by prospective developers) to buy the development rights from private landowners on the Gaviota coast. It allows all Gaviota residents to continue to use their land as they have been for as long as they like, obtain due compensation for the development rights to their land if and when they choose to offer them, and it allows the urban areas to earn protection of the Gaviota coast incrementally by gaining the value of increasing density on urban parcels: properties that in most cases would have to be up-zoned anyway (think state-mandated housing growth requirements).

I was disheartened when the Board of Supervisors, presented with this regional solution (which the study shows can be feasible), one by one rejected the concept -- simply because they were afraid of modest up-zonings in their respective districts.

was furious to hear that Goleta city officials, whose residents live closest to the Gaviota coast and therefore have the greatest stake in preserving it, have refused to even talk with county and Santa Barbara city officials about participating in a regional TDR solution.

Thankfully, I found more enlightened reception of the TDR study at a Santa Barbara City Council hearing. The council's dialogue and open-mindedness as they considered the tough tradeoffs provided in a TDR solution renewed my hope in the South Coast's future. I can only hope this rubs off on the county board.

Whether TDR turns out to be a workable solution, I wholeheartedly commend our Santa Barbara City Council for approaching the idea with open minds and generating an exciting and creative dialogue on the possibilities. In a kind of brainstorming session, council members offered exciting new ideas even beyond what the TDR report had envisioned.

Time and time again, I see the adage ring true -- "if you don't plan for growth, it plans you" -- and it seems as if our county officials and the city of Goleta are OK with sprawling development along the Gaviota coast while a viable solution slips through their fingers.

rustration and optimism abound in my opinion of our local elected officials and their respective visions (or lack thereof) for important land-use decisions. I hope South Coast residents can convince all of our jurisdictional governments to work together and champion a regional attitude to save our coast.

The recent National Park Service feasibility study (2003) on setting the Gaviota aside as a national seashore concluded that it is a resource of national significance worthy of protection, but that because of the extent of private property ownership, protection should come from within the local community.

I believe we are up to the challenge and I commend the Santa Barbara City Council for being willing to start the dialogue. Let's not let 2006 be the year we lost the Gaviota.

It seems as if our county officials and the city of Goleta are OK with sprawling development along the Gaviota coast while a viable solution slips through their fingers.

Jeff Phillips, The author, lives in Santa Barbara.