

A Tale of Two Cities!

A Dispatch from Sea

There is a place that I know where people live in apartment blocks. On the streets there are shops: a butcher, a baker, a grocer and a dress maker; a pharmacist, an optometrist, a tailor and a shoe maker. In this place streets are clean and lined with shade trees, children walk to school, parents take trams or bikes to work. Neighborhoods are places to live, to work and to play.

This is a place that is yet to be. A place that will turn an arid agricultural place on a wind swept plane between an airport and a river delta into a flourishing verdant place. A city that is like no other around it. Not a Rio Vista or a Fairfield or Vacaville be. A sustainable Mecca, a bastion for a prosperous working class able to live where they work, not encumbered by a dependency on a car or retail culture that looks no different than any other place.

Do cities not start as places where our hunter-gatherer fore-bearers cultivated agriculture and trade not because it was easy, but because it created a place of permanence. A place to be defended against by attack from others. A place that was sustained by a source of water and the good fortune of nature which created a community to be passed on to others.

In this place a white knight appears with a promise to provide such a place because it is the right thing to do because there is a need. A place where people can live and call it their own. Is this the place once called the “golden state” that held out the promise of sunshine and space to pursue the California dream? Was it a place that conformed to a perception but not often to a reality?

While waiting to be granted approval for this shining new city, why not try a modest experiment. What if one were to build a small prototype of this proposed City of Forever in Vallejo. Since you are taking this backwards looking approach toward a city of initially 40,000 and eventually 400,000 why not start here, in Vallejo? What better place to look back to the future than downtown Vallejo?

What if you took the vacant space downtown and made good on the “affordability-by-design” approach you seem to be promulgating? Create the 5-over-one apartments with the vibrant street life you envision and make it into a reality that it once was. Surely, it would be vastly easier to showcase a small project as a proof of concept than the vast scale you propose? Show us what you can do to infill a once prosperous downtown, then one might be more likely to believe your 50 year vision.

In the 1850s, Admiral Farragut didn’t get together with his billionaire buddies and hedge fund cronies and plant the seed which germinated into a naval base that birthed and nourished a City over the course of two world wars and a Cold War. The Navy was and in some ways still defines Vallejo.

Like so many navy bases, it was a city within a city. It's payroll was the economic locomotive of the city surrounding it. It had all the conveniences to be expected: housing; be it Marine barracks, dormitories for NCOs or mansions for officers; stores like a PX, a gas station, enlisted men's and officer's clubs, recreation centers and a golf courses. In so many ways a place to live, work and place. Oddly, it was this City with in a city that Lennar dismantled and now the Mare Island Company wants to restore.

In this tale of two cities one is still grappling with its dependence on the Navy while it emerges as a bedroom community for the rest of the Bay Area. Vallejo is the last reminder of the American Dream in the Bay Area where relative to every where else the American Dream of a single-family house is still attainable but at great cost.

The promise of a "city" sprouting out of the arid soils next to a major airport in the literal middle of no where is illusionary at best and delusional at worst. Government has the necessity to provide for national defense and build company towns like the Navy did. The desire of billionaires to meet the housing need for those who can't afford it serves only to assuage the guilt which comes from the accumulation of too much wealth.

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Long. 179-25.9 E