



MADERA TRIBUNE

COMMENTARY

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BY RICK FARINELLI

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Some critics are continuing one-sided judgments against the proposed North Fork Rancheria project, judgments which continue to be misguided and uninformed.

Some continually claim the project's location, in an unincorporated area north of the City of Madera along Highway 99, is in an urban area - though it fails to appear on a list of urban areas recently designated by the governor. Moreover, there are few nearby businesses or homes and no schools or churches. Most importantly, the County of Madera favors the site because it supports local land use and development plans.

## North Fork project deserves support

This proposed site does access a local infrastructure more capable of supporting growth and development than North Fork Rancheria's current location on environmentally sensitive lands via narrow country roads. This is something Fresno County supervisors recognized recently when they voted to halt further casino development in the fragile foothills.

Some suggest the North Fork Tribe somehow coerced Madera County into an agreement. This view insults both the tribe and county and fails to appreciate the significance of their arrangement. The tribe worked collaboratively with the county to mitigate potential impacts and fund public safety, infrastructure, education and other crucial services. That's why the supervisors endorsed the agreement 5-0.

Some criticize the North Fork project without offering viable options for dealing with the region's future population explosion and resulting strain on jobs, services and infrastructure. Personally, we prefer

a first-class entertainment and gaming resort to the other suggested projects - including prisons, landfills, and more distribution warehouses. We also favor a project that will generate thousands of local jobs, millions of dollars in government funding and possibly billions of dollars in local business - all through private investment.

Some imply that the rigorous federal fee-to-trust process by which tribes such as the North Fork Rancheria can acquire Indian lands eligible for gaming is trivial and open to manipulation. Both seem inaccurate.

Although the Business Coalition for Building a Better Madera does not get into legal matters, one reason we support the tribe is out of respect for its business conduct. To our knowledge, the tribe has been consistent and transparent in following the spirit and letter of the law. They have made a strong case for the proposed site's location within ancestral lands, the

mitigation of potential impacts - and openly have collaborated with relevant governments and agencies. That's why many refer to the tribe's approach as "responsible development" to counter the Bee's tired accusations of "reservation shopping."

We support the proposed North Fork project for what it truly represents: more jobs, business opportunities, and community support for a region that lags in jobs, income, education and infrastructure. Instead of constantly asking, "What is wrong with this project?" maybe the question should be "What is possible?"

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***Rick Farinelli is a member of Business Coalition for Building a Better Madera, a group of independent business and community leaders who say they envision a vital and economically strong Madera and support development that will help achieve that vision.***