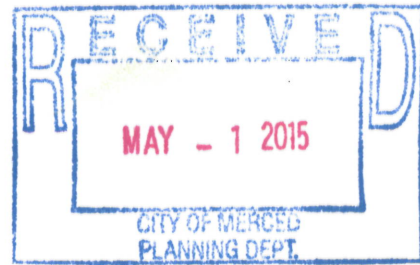


Joan Porter  
1715 N Street, Apt. 404  
Merced, CA 95340

Planning Commissioner  
678 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St.  
Merced, Ca 95340



April 27, 2015

To: The Planning Commissioner

I read with much dismay that Merced was once again wanting to build on a floodplain.

Please remember back a very few years ago when you wanted to build Walmart on a floodplain and Walmart went to the West side of Atwater where it would not damage the floodplain and put people and their property in jeopardy.

Kim Espinosa was the chair person at the time and did not even acknowledge receipt of what I sent to her so I sent it to Greg Wellman, City Manager of Atwater at the time and Atwater got Walmart in a safe area with approval of the B.O.S.

What I am sending is a true, first person experience that happened in Silicon Valley when it went from farmland to a high tech fortune. Please read it and see what can happen when you disregard the laws of nature and try to remake things in an incongruous way.

Thank you for your time,



Joan Porter

· The flooding of Alviso  
By  
Joan Porter

Silicon Valley grew rapidly between 1975 and 1982. Booming electronics corporations with names like IBM, Hewlett Packard, Apple Computers and hundreds of lesser known Hi-Tech companies caused an economic surge, population explosion and building expansion. Silicon Valley had grown unexpectedly from pear orchards, dairies and farms to a metropolis with cable cars and skyscrapers to accommodate an astronomic economic surge.

Everything has its price. Plant and animal life disappeared. Rivers and underground water sources were diverted and pumped into the San Francisco Bay, mostly through canals to make way for more and more construction. As might be expected, the bay began to rise and bayside communities began to flood. Water crept up on the land; beaches disappeared and flooding took its toll especially in the south bay.

The little town of Alviso had lost its ten foot sea wall to the bay. That 1930's structure never returned. A canal next to that small Hispanic shanty town drained water into the bay. Alviso began to flood each spring with runoff from higher ground, runoff from the Sierras through the San Joaquin delta and the influx of too many high rise buildings in Silicon Valley. It would be detrimental to the local economy if the expensive new areas were to flood.

In the spring of 1980, canal water rose to the top of its banks ready to flood San Jose, Santa Clara and the newly emerged Silicon Valley. Suddenly, in the wee hours of morning, Alviso flooded three feet deep and all else was saved. The citizens of Alviso said men from the water district were seen opening the floodgates in Alviso, but it

couldn't be proven. Who would believe those poor, poverty stricken Mexicans in the slums of Alviso?

In the spring of 1981, Alviso went six feet under water. The water spread all the way to Highway 237, then stopped abruptly. The ocean hugged and followed Highway 237 around the entire south bay that year. I lived in a Mobile Home Park just on the other side of Highway 237. I walked to the highway and looked out on the bay with breakers, waves and tides. How lucky that the ocean had not jumped the highway that year.

Fr. John Sweeney, a priest from Santa Clara, rowed to the church in Alviso to rescue the Blessed Sacrament, his sacred duty to protect. The Red Cross and disaster relief agencies helped the town's people cleanup and recoup their losses when the waters receded.

The people of Alviso cried out in anguish to the County of Santa Clara to please not flood the town again. But as usual, the poor went unheard amid denials of deliberate flooding. Some said it might be a good thing if Alviso was left at the bottom of the bay as the hopeless slum it had become.

The floods of 1982 came quick and furious. The mobile home park where I lived was surrounded by a levee as required by law because of the flooding potential. The residents of the park were notified that the floods were coming again and this year we would be affected. We were given the options of leaving the park during the flood or staying inside the park's levee until the waters receded. No one knew how long the flooding would last.

With a keen sense of adventure, I surveyed my terrain and found a spot where flood waters could be breached. I could make access to the canal bank. If I could cross the canal at the highway, I would be on the dry side. I parked my car in a safe area on the opposite side of the canal and walked into the park by the afore mentioned route. My decision to stay and experience this once in a life time event had been made.

I telephoned my daughter and told her what was happening. "I'll be right home," Sharyl said.

"Maybe you should stay with a friend tonight," I suggested.

"I'll be home in just a few minutes, she stated defiantly.

An hour later, Sharyl called me. "I got to the stop light and just looked. I'm not going into that. I'm staying at Linda's tonight."

"Good thinking," I responded.

I went outside and climbed to the top of the levee. To the south, north and west, everything looked normal. To the east, the San Francisco bay was moving in with waves and breakers. I wondered if my decision to stay was a good one and returned to my little home. About a dozen homes were occupied; the remainder of the 150 were abandoned.

Night and darkness came. I slept on the couch in the living room and didn't bother to get out of my clothes. Senses sharp, I was prepared for an emergency. Every smell, sound or feeling left my nerves jumping.

Suddenly, a faint chirping like a million insects began a crescendo that lasted for more than an hour. The unearthly sound was like being in a science fiction movie.

Rushing water, like a massive waterfall hitting trees, rocks, boulders and anything else in its way, reached a nerve shattering frequency and remained for a maddening length of time. I plugged my ears with my fingers to stop the shrillness. Then abruptly the sounds stopped. My ears strained to hear something, anything. There was only silence. I knew instinctively that water had surrounded the levee. To my surprise, public water, electricity, phones, sewer system and gas were all working.

Sleep that night was fitful. The sun came up and I quickly dressed for work, then left giving myself a full hour to reach my destination to compensate for the flood and rerouted traffic.

Climbing to the top of the levee around the park, I surveyed my oceanic domain. No one would travel Highway 237 that day. Alviso flood waters joined the bay in the east and extended across the Highway for about a mile to the west towards San Jose.

I looked for my predetermined crossing and found the high spot to freedom leading from the levee to the canal bank, then across the canal at the edge of the highway. Accepting Neptune's challenge, I cautiously made my way to the dry side of the canal and my car. My return from work was just as cautious as I challenged the ocean to battle.

A few short days later, the water returned to its place in the bay. The water lines against buildings in Alviso were nine feet high. Alviso was devastated and would not be able to survive another flood like the spring of 1982. Santa Clara County needed to formulate a solution to prevent flooding from happening again. It was not an easy task, but it was accomplished. That was the last year of flooding.

I'm not sure how flood control was achieved, but some say if a major earthquake rocks the South San Francisco Bay that a process called liquefaction will sink buildings into a quagmire of quicksand from Milpitas to Fremont. People say many things. Could it really happen?