

# **The Boomtown Chronicles: Reflections On a Changing California**

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**Transcript: Interviews with Sam Farr, and people of Vista De  
Los Montañas, Salinas 2004.**

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Tape 1: Sam Farr in his office in Salinas 3-04

**SAM FARR:** We have a problem in the central coast in particular in Monterey County which is the biggest part of the central coast and it's that government is not using its authority in law to insist that the housing that gets developed is for the local workforce and the local people. When you think about the history of America, housing was built for local workers, and people who were brought in to work in town, to live there. It's now shifted now, because the housing along the coast of California, the quality of life along the coast of California is some of the highest in the world, so people are coming from all over this country and retirees with a lot of money to buy housing along the California coast, pricing locals out of their homes. And when locals retire here, they realize they can sell their home for over a million dollars and go buy a home for half that amount in Arizona or Las Vegas, and then invest that amount, and have some higher standard of living for their investment. From a capital sense it makes sense for these people to sell their homes and move out. But for the people who are buying them, they're not people who can buy them on salaries their earning on the central coast. And we have really an opportunity to do something about it by using the inclusionary requirements that are required by state law. Unfortunately, they're very limiting. Only 15% is required, only if the community insists on it. You can buy your way out of it by paying into a trust fund for low moderate-income people somewhere else. These trust funds have gotten very fat, because there's nobody who wants to take responsibility for making sure the housing gets built. There's a NIMBY, not in my backyard, I don't want a lot of low-income housing built here. Fort Orde is probably the best opportunity, it's land given by the federal government to local governments free, if you talk to developers the biggest cost is buying land, it's the land costs that are expensive. If you can sell the land to us for a discount, we can build and sell the houses cheaper. But the will is not there by local elected officials. The spirit of these communities is that they recognize that it's a problem. The business community recognizes it's a problem, but the commitment to the politics of it is because people have been raised seeing how public housing was built by the government, and those have become housing projects, or tenements, and they became ghettoized, and a lot of crime, and that's what they think. But that's not the way it works anymore. They say we'll help you get low interest loans, we'll guarantee some rent payments through voucher programs, but you have to build the housing and you have to make it mixed housing. And if you want to see some of that it's mixed housing around here> when we take people out, city councilmen and the like, they see it and say, Wow, I never believed that you could do it this way. So we're having to overcome this mindset that housing for low income people has got to be ugly, has to be a poor neighborhood, and that people don't know how to take care of their houses. The modern housing is just as attractive as any housing in America.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How would you characterize California's housing crunch? If you took a snapshot? **SF:** I've thought a lot about it. I've thought a lot about how does California do its fair share? And I think what you do is half the new population is Ca. Is newborn, and half are immigrants from other states and other countries. If you really want to control the population, you do it through family

planning. People are coming because the jobs are available here. They like the job, they take it but they find they can't afford to buy the house in California, afford the rents in Cal. So thank you for the offer.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Is it having an economic impact?

**SAM FARR:** We already have a workforce in the state, and despite all its problems, a good educational system. If we put all our efforts into making this the best educational system, with that diversity of population, you would never need to import talent. We should be supplying all the workforce and be self sustaining employment wise. We have to get a handle on housing and here how I think you do that. From a state as large as Cal. And its fifty-seven counties, is that each county ought to be responsible for its share of the population. So those counties with a major population center, S.F., L.A., San Diego. They ought to be responsible for taking their percentage of the growth. That would be about 1 % for Monterey County. That means we ought to be building 2000 units more. How do you do that where you are trying to preserve agriculture and tourism of our natural areas? You do it by infill and by better density uses. People say I don't think you should increase density. Well, you take the city of Santa Cruz, which had the earthquake destroy downtown S.C. they doubled everything and it looked better than ever before. With good planning and design and architecture, you can rebuild our cities and our neighborhoods to be more attractive and hold more people.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** What about sprawl. That's been said that's the plague of California. Everybody wants their 1.5 acres and a big lawn, and they might be willing to commute a long way. It seems like the central coast isn't immune to sprawl.

**SAM FARR:** The County who has done the best to contain sprawl is Santa Cruz County, and they formed LAFCO, which has to approve any development or annexation. They zoned the unincorporated land strictly. That is Ag land's got to be Ag land's got to be Ag land. If you want more land you have to apply to LAFCO and they've been turning it down with the exception recently of Watsonville which was able to get more. It's a very good model, and it began with political will. Monterey County, which has even more reason to stop urban sprawl than any other county in California, because we are the number one coastal agricultural county in the world. So paving over Ag land is the worst economic conversion you can do, but the pressure, for tax purposes, and big box zoning. The economic irony of that is that they're bringing in goods that are manufactured offshore, and paving over goods that are manufactured right here locally, which are agricultural goods which are sold overseas. Our balance of trade is ruined by urban sprawl, our Ag land is ruined by urban sprawl, and you can't ever get that back, and the local economy is ruined, because the Ag industry is ruined. Our future really is in agriculture, but we really need to insist we grow up not out.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** I was just talking with Sabino Lopez at CCA about this very thing. And he said S.C. is the worst example of NIMBYism, and the anti-growth forces are to blame for the lack of spaces to build low income. Is he onto something there?

**SAM FARR:** The people who are saying that aren't doing their homework. Watsonville is building affordable housing in the city limits. The people who think they're going to get affordable housing by buying land that is cheap out in the boonies, and you have to depend on local systems, no shopping areas, you have to use your car...Salinas complains they have the highest density of any city in California, where you have ten or 15 people living in a one bedroom house, I think Salinas is correct in that. They don't go the next step and said, what if you took them up another story, and built parks and childcare centers, and built up the density. That's where you have better use of resources where you could use existing resources, rather than having to pave over Ag land.  
(In Car on way to housing development)

**SAM FARR:** Santa Cruz to me is an example of a city which overcame a lot of biases of height limitation, they realized they could go up another story, and increased densities, and in the end, they had a city which had more commercial space, and more space for senior citizens, the environment won, more high tech companies moved in to the second and third story.

## **Tape 2/Sam Farr in Salinas plus Vista De Las Montanans complex visit**

Continuation of tour.

My name is **Sophia Bravo**: Resident Manager for Mountain View. This is our computer lab and it's free for our residents, it's mostly used by high school students they can type their papers. We also have parents, who are taking English classes here. The YMCA hires someone.  
A meeting room... Car honks.

Sophia talks with client...

Walking, talking...

**SAM FARR:** What's the demographic mixture.

**SOPHIA:** Yes, we do, we have....Filipino, Samoan, Caucasian, black, we have three Caucasian families, two black families. Majority is Hispanic. Most of them are hospital workers, school workers, store workers, 35% are in agricultural. (asthma) I grew up in East Salinas, All my family members are five blocks away. It's really nice having family around.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Most are families?

**SAM FARR:** Either a couple or a family up to ten?

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Any limit on the number of people?

**SAM FARR:** We have a limit of ten, but if they have another person, we're not going to turn them down.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Any definition of family?

**G:** It's up to them to define it. But we do have priority on families.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** This is our new tenant

**G:** knocks...

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** talking about babies.

**G:** Buenos tardes, Spanish.. Bad Spanish...  
Ella Quiere conocer, como le gusta?  
Tres Meses?  
In Salinas.  
Esta Mejor?  
Como?

Because it's safer for the ninos and it's calmer.

Mas Segura?

(Spanish) Yes...

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How did you find out about it?

**G:** She put an application when we barely had a waiting list. There's a big waiting list. She was 100, there are 1000 on the waiting list. They find it so nice and pleasant they don't want to move out. Ask question of kids. What do you tell the 1500 on the waiting list to do?

**SAM FARR:** To hold on. To wait...

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** They must stay in Salinas.

**SAM FARR:** We send them a letter once a year and ask if they still want to be on the list

9.05: That's the school, there's a junior high two blocks away, you have everything right there.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How long will it take this place to become a community?

**SAM FARR:** Everybody knows everybody. They know what to do and not to do.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** That's good because they look out for each other.

**SAM FARR:** Last time someone walked through, they called the police.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Thank you for your time.

**SAM FARR:** That's Nancy...

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Hi, can I interview you?

**NANCY:** For low income?

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Do you like living here?

**NANCY:** No, not really.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** You don't like it?

**NANCY:** I don't like the fact that my car got keyed.

**NANCY:** I was just talking to a lady across the street and she said to tell Sam Farr that we need affordable housing for teachers. She needs to be able to live closer..

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** On a teacher's salary, you can't live here.

**NANCY:** Through the AIDS ministry, it's an underground AIDS ministry, they help people with HIV/AIDS. There's a network.

**NANCY:** They need housing for people.  
I like the apartment, I don't like my neighbors.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Is it hard to be in a mixed ethnic housing development.

**NANCY:** My son got hassled.

**NANCY:** I love everybody. I hope everybody can love everybody. I was talking with a neighbor and she said her son almost got stabbed out here, right out here.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Did you feel safer in Marina.

**NANCY:** I'm ready to own. I'm still trying to find my place. I'm still searching. I want to live on the beach in a multi-million dollar house...

**Bells of ice cream vendor, NANCY:** Pena?  
Gelateria?

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** This is the sound of  
Salinas

212,500,-225,500( self-help housing, teamed up with teachers at Alisal, county of Monterey, Dan Green/Chispa- 100K below market. Efficient two bedroom two bath, dining room, tile roofs, on 5000sq ft. lots, two car garage,

R; What about property taxes, does that get them in the end/

**DAVID** Generally speaking, the assessor is trying to evaluate them at their purchase price, and sometimes there are some subsidies.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How do you like living here?

**KID:** Not too much.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Why?

**KID:** There's no pool.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Do you like living in this new house?

**KID:** Yeah.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** What don't you like living in it? That the manager is mean.

What did he say? We can use the slip and slide? Is it the best or worst/  
Do you feel safe at night? Yes. You couldn't do that in most places in East Salinas.

**KID:** Yea, you get shot.

23:57

**KID:** ... David, come here...

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Is this a new place for you to live?

**DAVID:** Yea.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How long? Two years? What do you like or not like about it?

**JIMMY:** I like everything about it. It's in a good neighborhood.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Where did you used to live?

**JIMMY:** A bad street.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** What used to happen there/

**JIMMY:** A lot of people used to get shot.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** You saw someone get shot?

**JIMMY:** Some guys were trying to jump them, then they stabbed them with a knife, then they shot them.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How did that make you feel?

**JIMMY:** Like moving.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** I noticed you're having a car wash- yes.

25: 29.. some sounds.

**JIMMY:** As it is, they didn't want the kids to get wet out here.. we're paying for that water. They're not paying for the water.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** They don't even want kids riding bikes around here.

**JIMMY:** Yea, they are, it's hot.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How about the gang stuff, it doesn't happen around here?

**JIMMY:** Yes, it's good, but ... I don't know.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Do you think want to stay in Salinas.

**JIMMY:** Hell, no. It's not safe here anymore... I want to go back to Sacramento, that's where I'm from. Where I can walk safe, and I don't walk safe. I just got a gun pulled on me yesterday, I swear to god. I was just walking to the store.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** How can you raise kids around here? What did you do?

**JIMMY:** I just stood my ground like a man, and said if you're going to shoot me, shoot me. It makes me angry, how you going to put my life in jeopardy!

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?

**JIMMY:** I didn't find out about it, my mom actually did. I like it.

What do you like about it.

Hanging out with the kids. It's fun.

I used to live on Rossi Street.

Is it better?

Yes, it's better...

Do you have to walk?

No, we have a car.

Thank you...

More kids yelling, ice cream truck, pop goes the weasel, talking...

29:23:

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** One of the homes belongs to unity care, kids who have aged out of foster care. They have a housefather and they're sharing and learning life skills. These are beautiful homes.

**SAM FARR:** It would be hard to believe driving through homes like this that these are below market rate homes. I thought it was unique that these were bought by school districts and other partners.

**WOMAN:** I think it's neat to see women walking the rooflines like they're mountain goats and applying the knowledge that they've learned and they help each other, and they have a block of homes and each family helps one another with their self help home.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Then they get some construction skills.

Nancy: Chispa.

**SAM FARR:** This would be called urban sprawl in the old days..

**NANCY:** These are other homes that are market rate and self-help.

**SAM FARR:** When we had the home tour of local officials, this was the model. Most of the people just stood inside that house and said wow, you can have a house like this and sell it as cheap as you did? It goes to show that where there's a will, there can be a way. You might ask why a federal office gets involved in an issue like this... That's why the waiting list is so long. The frustration in the community with people is that they're panicked. They come to our office as a last resort.

**NANCY:** People come in or call the congressmen's office asking for assistance. There's no emergency housing in Salinas. If a family has been asked to leave where they're living and they have no funds for first and last months rent, especially in this valley, and they ask for help. I can give them names and numbers to call, but there's no housing. There's no applications being accepted at this time and there's a waiting list of two months to two years. Lack of funds, lack of places to go. They were just building at the seams with applicants, so they had to stop taking applications for rent vouchers.

The thing with rent vouchers, people have to go out and find housing. And their living off the private sectors' price structure, and there are not that many landlords that will take the vouchers. Frankly, it's a great program since they get paid automatically through a electronic transfer. They want section 8 housing, but where they want to live, not where it's available. There are agencies in town that will help with first and last month's rent on a one-time basis. They will pay their P.G.and E bill, etc. But with the economy slows, so has donations. The funding sources have dried up.

**NANCY:** In the housing authority realm, there are many different housing programs. As we saw in Mt. View town homes, once a family locates, they don't want to leave, and we see that time and time again..

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** Is housing ever going to come up as a national issue?

**SAM FARR:** It's every community's problem, because the zoning of land, which is the underlying factor, is a local responsibility. The state doesn't do zoning, and the feds don't do zoning. It creates the vision thing. What I think we're lacking is enough vision thing is the ability to create housing for our local workforce. The need to do this is relatively new. Even in rural communities people commuted into work in urban communities. In rural towns people are commuting to rural towns. That didn't used to be the case, people walked to work. Nobody ever thought you'd have to get in your car and drive a couple of miles to work. The whole population commutes. Which means you have traffic on the roads which is taking the place of traffic that is tourism coming in and Ag produce out. If the roads are so congested just with people commuting to and from work, you're losing the economic inflow and outflow of what your community is all about. It's

economic necessity that the people who live in their communities should be able to live in their communities.

**RACHEL GOODMAN:** There are some places where people commute two hours.

**NANCY:** We have an employee who commutes 1:15 minutes each way from Los Banos.

**SAM FARR:** Americans spend more time in their cars and watching TV. than they do getting educated.  
4100:

**SAM FARR:** You will hear people talking about it's almost the acceptable norm. It's difficult on the commuter, it doesn't help the environment. The housing transportation balance really is an important thing. We need to make sure the ability to create jobs and housing ought to be balanced. Everything you do to bring businesses into communities, you ought to also create housing for the workforce. Ask local officials what they've actually done to commit, federal law says you have to commit 15% of your housing. What have they actually done to build affordable housing? The redevelopment law of California, the commitment there is that 15% of the money has to be used for affordable housing, not housing on the spot. They push the decision for building affordable housing to the end, the people who moved in don't want it to happen. Santa Cruz did something unique. They required that in your inclusionary housing, you had to move in the subsidized people in first. Then sort of ganging up on the last one in being the affordable people, the low-income folks. 20% affordable housing... we've taken action, but there has been no action since they transferred the land. The federal government has the largest development on Fort Orde. For people who have been convicted of drug and alcohol use, and now want