

HARRINGTON BACK AS INTERIM CALAVERAS PLANNING CHIEF

POST HAS SEEN HIGH TURNOVER IN RECENT YEARS

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SAN ANDREAS - Former Calaveras County Administrative Officer Brent Harrington rose through the ranks back in the past century before top Calaveras County officials seemed to resign or get fired every two or three years.

But whether he can help usher in a new era of stability on the county's Planning Department is another question.

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to hire Harrington at an annual salary of a little less than \$110,000 to serve as interim planning director.

He's not expected to get a full year's salary, however, because his contract is only from Oct. 7 to Jan. 31. County leaders hope that gives them time to find a replacement for Rebecca Willis, who resigned in August after two years on the job.

Willis was the sixth person to have served as the county's top planning official in the previous seven years. One of her predecessors was Harrington, who filled in after another planning official was forced to resign amid controversy.

Whether it is possible for anyone to last in the job is an open question. Harrington came under fire in 2009 during his stint as interim Community Development Agency Director when he announced that popular plans for land use drafted by residents of a number of communities would be of only limited use as the county revised its general plan for land use. Four years later, that General Plan revision is still not done.

Willis departed at a time when she was under growing pressure from elected leaders to find ways to bend rules to approve land use proposals such as housing subdivisions.

"The political expectations and the reality, they just don't match," Willis said in August. "I think there are expectations of economic prosperity so quickly. I don't know anybody that could do that."

Harrington worked in Los Angeles before coming to Calaveras County to work as a planner in 1977. He was named county planning director in 1979 and stayed in that position until he became the county's administrative coordinator in 1988. In 1989, he became county administrative officer, the county's top executive. He stayed in that post until 2001 when he left to serve as executive officer for the Regional Council of Rural Counties, a Sacramento-based group that lobbies on behalf of California's rural counties.

Critics of Harrington note that he was in key leadership roles in the county during the decades when it adopted flawed General Plan elements that have frustrated property owners since and caused the county to lose several land-use-related lawsuits.

In particular, the current General Plan labels many county areas as suitable for future residential development when roads and other infrastructure in those locations are often inadequate.

"I hope he has evolved," said Joyce Techel, a long-time activist on land use issues and the chairwoman of MyValleySprings.com.

Others, however, praise Harrington as a friend of economic growth and business interests.

Al Segalla, president of the Calaveras County Taxpayers Association, said he remembers that during Harrington's tenure "there was almost no obstacle from the county government" for approving land development projects.

"He had almost a pro-growth mentality," Segalla said. "He was pretty good."

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