

Valley Springs growth projected for a steep decline

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ March 22, 2013

The Valley Springs area, which along with Rancho Calaveras has been the juggernaut of Calaveras County's population growth the past three decades, has been earmarked for relatively little growth under a proposed General Plan Land Use Map discussed Tuesday at a joint meeting of the county's Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission.

Although one of the stated underlying philosophies of the General Plan update "is to direct new development toward already developed communities," Valley Springs falls behind Copperopolis, Arnold, San Andreas, Mokelumne Hill, Murphys-Douglas Flat, Wallace and Avery-Hathaway Pines in potential build-out envisioned in preparing the second draft of a new General Plan Land Use Map.

The west Calaveras communities of Valley Springs and Rancho Calaveras contain approximately a third of the county's population, or roughly 15,000 out of 45,578 residents in 2010.

Data presented at Tuesday's meeting and based on the proposed land use map foresees additional capacity of 445 new housing units and a potential population increase of 1,064 between now and 2035.

Copperopolis on the other hand could see 6,968 additional housing units and an estimated additional population of 16,654.

Supervisors and commissioners indicated they liked what they saw in the new map. They gave direction to staff to commence a formal public comment period on the map.

Although Tuesday's meeting was not part of the upcoming official public comment period, public comments were taken.

Watertown Road resident Joe Bechelli questioned the planning staff's decision to designate three parcels in the area as industrial in the new land use map.

The parcels belong to Tom Coe and one of them is adjacent to residences along Watertown Road, Bechelli said.

He questioned the logic of having industrial property next to residential property and said a buffer zone should be between the two land uses.

Local contractor and Calaveras County Water District board member Jeff Davidson voiced his concerns and raised questions about the new land use map.

Public input from the Valley Springs Community Plan process seems to have been ignored in creating the latest land use map draft, Davidson said.

"I feel that much of that has been disregarded," he said.

In addition, the latest map shows concentrated growth in Burson and Jenny Lind where water and sewer services are unavailable, while ignoring other areas where infrastructure already is in place, he said.

Ron Randall, chairman of the Valley Springs Community Plan Citizens Committee, said he had not had enough time to review the second draft, but cautioned the county not to ignore his committee's efforts, which resulted in the preferred community plan for Valley Springs.

The new map show real promise, said Colleen Platt of MyValleySprings. She urged the board and the planning panel to move forward with the General Plan update.

Platt said she hopes the county will consider changes to the latest draft.

"There's still a need for local review and discussion on the Valley Springs map," she added.

Peter Racz of Jenny Lind cautioned the county about MyValleySprings' input saying the organization does not reflect the views of most residents.

Former County Supervisor Tom Tryon, an advocate of larger parcel sizes in rural Calaveras and steering population growth toward the county's existing population centers, said now is the time for environmental groups to show up and espouse the same approach.