

Draft General Plan update could be released next month

By Nick Baptista – The Valley Springs News, Friday, October 31, 2014

After nearly \$2 million in expenditures over an eight-year period, Calaveras County's long overdue draft version of the General Plan update is close to being released to the public.

The General Plan update has been in the works since Dec. 4, 2006. Back then the board set a two-year timeframe to complete the task.

Nearly six years after the first deadline, County Planning Director Peter Maurer projected the draft could be ready for release next month, possibly the second week of November, and he had several questions Tuesday for the county Board of Supervisors to consider prior to the document's release.

Maurer in August told the board the update would be completed in October for public review, but there were "a lot of loose ends" that needed to be addressed he said on Tuesday.

Delays are nothing new to the eight-year General Plan update odyssey that has seen a cast of planning directors, consultants and supervisors come and go. Merita Callaway is the lone supervisor remaining on the board since the decision was made to update the county's existing General Plan, which serves as the blueprint for future development.

Maurer was seeking the board's guidance on how long the public could review the draft before scheduling workshops and hearings on the document. The consensus of the board and county Planning Commission was to allow for a 90-day review period.

The first public meetings on the General Plan update could begin sometime in February.

The board and planning commission would meet jointly at many of those meetings, it was decided. However, the planning commission would meet separately when it deliberates on its recommendations to the board.

Maurer, the board and planning commission agreed it would be difficult at this time to determine how many meetings would be necessary. The planning director will schedule the first round of meetings "and see where it goes from there."

Meetings throughout the county and evening sessions were also agreed upon.

A planning staff suggestion to include a zoning map update as part of the project for the General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report was rejected by supervisors and planning commissioners as being too confusing and time consuming.

Staff and consultant time lately has been spent on getting the General Plan update “as close to right” as possible, Maurer said, so an Environmental Impact Report has to be done only once before the update is adopted.

He anticipated some changes would be made to the update, but wholesale changes would be costly, possibly necessitating another EIR, and time consuming.

Environmentalists and Tea Party members were upset with the board’s decision to keep secret previous administrative drafts of the General Plan update.

Tom Infusino of the Calaveras Planning Coalition, which includes a variety of conservation and environmental organizations, said there were two drafts of the U.S. Constitution and they’re easily accessible for public review as so should the county’s previous unreleased General Plan update documents.

By releasing those documents, the public would get a better understanding of the process leading up to the final draft, he added.

Tea Party member Peter Racz of Rancho Calaveras said public funds were used to prepare those drafts and the public was entitled to see the work.

If the board is unwilling to release the documents, he added, supervisors should be prepared to refund those expenditures back to taxpayers.