

General Plan Draft EIR receives feedback

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Many members of the public attended Calaveras County's first General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report meeting Tuesday night.

They commented on the draft and asked the county to make a commitment to reduce the estimated two dozen significant Impacts from growth in the proposal. These significant impacts would be on traffic, fire safety, water delivery, sewer capacity, agricultural lands, oak woodlands, historic resources, noise, air quality, and wildlife habitat.

The speakers addressed their comments to Planning Director Pater Maurer, who moderated the discussion in the Board of Supervisors Chambers.

"Policies that do not commit to reduce impacts are not mitigation measures," said Marti Crane of Valley Springs. She went on to list seven examples when draft General Plan Update mitigation measures improperly included non-committal language such as "shall consider", "encourage", and "should".

"The people of Calaveras County deserve straight talk," she said. "The county needs to say 'yes' when it means 'yes,' and 'no' when it means 'no.'"

Her comments were echoed by Penny Sarvis of Murphys. Speaking about the county's proposal to complete a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Sarvis noted that the mitigation measure included no timelines, methods, standards, or reporting procedures to insure that implementation will be completed.

"I fear it won't happen," she said.

Heidi Beswick, staff scientist for the Central Sierra Resource Center, complained the mitigation measures are comprised by "caveats" and "weak language." She provided examples of how to properly phrase measures to reduce impacts to riparian woodlands and wildlife corridors.

To demonstrate the need to mitigate traffic safety impacts, Joyce Techel of MyValleySprings.com provided a map identifying the 1,537 traffic accidents throughout Calaveras County from 2011 to 2016, including 34 fatalities.

"Accident rates measure the level of safety," she said. "We can no longer accept the failure to fund our roads!"

Jack Norton described many areas of concern about development impacts to agriculture, forestry, and minerals, concluding simply.

“A general plan is expected to be clear and not vague,” he said.

Calaveras Planning Coalition Facilitator Tom Infusino offered a list of eight state and federal programs with funds available to help fixed income seniors maintain their homes, lower water and sewer rates, maintain agricultural and forest lands in production, strengthen the local economy, and provide for parks and wildlife habitat.

“If you put these actions into your plan, then you won’t have 25 significant impacts from your plan,” he said.

To demonstrate the silliness of a government using weak language to address such serious issues, CSERC Director John Buckley said, “You don’t ‘encourage’ people to pay taxes, and you don’t ‘consider’ obeying the law.”

He concluded by reminding the planning director that adopting “feasible and meaningful” mitigation measures will help the General Plan DEIR to withstand legal challenge.

Vicky Reinke disagreed with the requests for “very precise” language. She asked that the General Plan remain in “very general terms.”

People also discussed the alternatives to the county’s proposed plan that should be evaluated in the DEIR.

A representative of Castle and Cooke, the developers of Saddle Creek and Copper Town Square, asked that their proposed developments for Copper Valley Ranch and Sawmill Lake be added into the county’s plan.

Crane asked that the Mintier Draft General Plan be evaluated as an alternative in the DEIR. That plan was developed by the county with public participation from 2007 to 2012, at a cost of nearly \$1 million, but has never been released to the public.

Botanist Liz Gregg indicated that CSERC supported the “DOF alternative,” which would reduce the population potential under the plan down from 117,045 to 55,441 people, to coincide with the population growth estimate for 2035 provided by the California Department of Finance.

Retired planner Antonie Wurster asked the county to consider a “no growth alternative, because that’s what we may be looking at.” She wondered if people will want to come to Calaveras County in the future given the high fire danger.

The final topic of the evening was a call for people to find common ground. Wurster asked people to collaborate and try to help each other. Stressing the need to finish the general plan, District 5 supervisor candidate Ben Stopper asked the planning director to “Address these comments so we can come to a united conclusion and the General Plan can move forward.”

Planning Director Maurer reminded people that written comments on the DEIR must be received by the Planning Department before 4 p.m. Aug. 13.

Written comments by mail should be addressed to Peter Maurer, Planning Director, Calaveras County Planning Department, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249, or by email to pmaurer@co.calaveras.ca.us.

The DEIR can be viewed at the main library or on the county website at <http://planning.calaverasgov.us/GP-Update/CEQA>. A computer disk or hard copy can be purchased at the Planning Department