

CALAVERAS PLAN LATE BUT COSTS CONTAINED

By **Dana M. Nichols**
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Record Staff Writer

SAN ANDREAS - The Calaveras County General Plan is behind schedule, but it is not over budget. At least not yet.

Officials reported this week that the effort, under way since 2006, to revise the document that regulates county land use and growth is still going to cost about \$1.1 million, despite that it won't be done until late 2011, several years later than planned.

A variety of factors have delayed completion of the plan, including staff turnover in the Planning Department; additions in the General Plan to address agriculture, water and economic development; and the inclusion of 16 community plans, especially the one for Valley Springs, which has generated controversy and yielded two rival proposals.

Despite the delays and additions, officials have managed to contain costs for the project, because the Sacramento-based Mintier Harnish consulting firm reduced its rates. Also, some tasks were shifted from the project consultant to county staff, which contributed to delays but saved money.

Still, as the project enters what is supposed to be its final 11 months, there are questions about whether it can continue to stay within budget and meet the expectations of county leaders and the public.

There's enough money remaining in the budget, for example, to pay for renting large halls for two final hearings before the Board of Supervisors and two before the Planning Commission, said Barbara Gillarde, the county's general plan coordinator.

If other meetings are needed, then those meetings will have to be held in smaller venues that can be used free of charge, she said.

Another question is how many comments the plan will get as it goes through its environmental impact report.

"In some cases, you could get literally thousands of comments in the EIR," Gillarde said.

Staff are required to respond.

"Some of the comments require a very detailed and legal response from us," said George White, the county's director of planning.

Meanwhile, the MyValleySprings.com advocacy group has asked that county officials do a full analysis of a proposed community plan for Valley Springs developed through a two-year public process facilitated by the Calaveras Council of Governments and paid for by a state transportation grant.

A rival Valley Springs plan prepared by Supervisor Gary Tofanelli and a committee of property owners is the preferred alternative and is the only option scheduled for a full analysis.

White said there is no funding to pay for the cost of analyzing the council's Valley Springs plan.

Not true, said Muriel Zeller, a member of MyValleySprings.com. Zeller said she found several state and federal sources willing to fund the analysis and had informed White.

Contact reporter Dana M. Nichols at (209) 607-1361 or dnichols@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/calaverasblog.