

Hot-button issues on board agenda

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Controversy is likely to ring out at Tuesday's Calaveras County Board of Supervisors meeting as the board considers what to do about the Valley Springs community plan and fees for sludge disposal.

VS map presented

Supervisor Gary Tofanelli is bringing back a new proposed land-use map for Valley Springs that came as result of several meetings he held with the stakeholders in the community planning process. His effort to hammer out a compromise to the map presented May 4 by the Calaveras Council of Governments has been criticized for not being inclusive enough.

"We hope that any maps that come from those meetings are made available to the public before the board votes on them," Joyce Techel, president of myvalleysprings.com, said at this week's board meeting. "We further hope that an analysis of the build-out capacity for the new map is done and we also feel it is important the people know who was on this committee."

Techel went to the last week's Planning Commission meeting and said that myvalleysprings.com had dropped out of the meetings being held by Tofanelli.

"After attending and observing the May 17 meeting at the Planning Department, myvalleysprings.com believes there is a conflict of interest having a small, handpicked group working behind closed doors," Techel said at the May 20 Planning Commission meeting. "We are unwilling to ignore and abandon over a year of existing public input and direction."

However, Tofanelli and other members of his committee said that it was an equal process in which all the stakeholders had one seat and were able to express their wishes and work together.

"Myvalleysprings had a seat at that table and still do," Tofanelli said.

At the core of the debate is a land-use map and community plan that was crafted during several community meetings held by the CCOG. The agency received a \$255,000 Caltrans grant for the planning process.

The fight started after the process was well under way and a boundary map, which included La Contenta, Gold Creek Estates and Rancho Calaveras, was voted in at the Aug. 27, 2009, meeting.

A successful campaign was waged by Rancho residents who wanted nothing to

do with becoming part of Valley Springs. Their collective effort, which included many attacks on the CCOG's process, resulted in a new vote and Rancho being removed.

However, the land-use map that eventually surfaced from the CCOG process and that was presented May 4 to the Board of Supervisors didn't fare much better than the Aug. 27 map.

New objections were raised by a number of property owners who realized that the May 4 map was changing the designation of their properties in ways they said would diminish value.

By the end of the five-hour May 4 hearing, the future of the Valley Springs community plan was very tenuous and it looked as if the whole process might be scrapped. The county was considering just rolling the original 1974 plan into the current general plan update.

Tofanelli asked for a bit more time to try and meet with all the interested parties and try and come up with something that everyone could agree to. The work done by the smaller group is up for review by the board Tuesday.

Sludge fest returns

Acceptance policies for sludge at the Rock Creek Landfill are the second item that's likely to heat up Tuesday.

Public Works is recommending a new fee structure and standards for the biosolids. The affected waste treatment facilities have been crying foul over the proposed changes since last summer, when Public Works Director Tom Garcia recommended raising the fee from \$6.33 a ton to \$54.

The Calaveras County Water District, San Andreas Sanitary District and the city of Angels Camp protested the change and said the county was breaking an agreement with them that was part of two Board of Supervisors resolutions passed in 2002.

Bill Perley, director of utilities at CCWD, testified several times in front of the board that the county, through the resolutions, had entered into a long-term contract. He said that when the resolutions passed and the deal was struck, the agencies gave up their contracts with Forward landfill in Stockton.

He added that for the waste treatment providers to be in compliance with the state, they had to have long-term agreements for disposal of the sludge.

Sludge is solid matter that settles to the bottom of sedimentation tanks in a sewage treatment plant and must be disposed of by digestion or other methods or recycled to the land. After it is processed and dried it creates a dirt-like matter

that is being used in some areas as fertilizer.

In the past year, the sludge discussion has taken some twists and turns as CCWD and the other service providers explored their options. When the efforts to get the county to live up to the agreements failed, they moved on to looking into building their own facility at SASD's plant and also reconnecting with Forward. It appeared at the April 28 CCWD board of directors meeting that the fight was over and that the agencies would just go back to the Stockton landfill, which would charge \$28 a ton for disposal.

Just when it seemed like the deed was done, Public Works countered with a new fee proposal that sets \$28 a ton for the first year and rises \$2 a year until it reaches \$40 in 2016-17.

However, while the fees might be more competitive, the new requirement for the sludge to be 90 percent solid to be accepted at Rock Creek is essentially barring anyone from being able to dump there, Perley said.

"There's no way anyone could meet that," Perley said Thursday.

He said 90 percent is much higher than even the state requirement. Perley pulled out a copy of a letter written in 2002 by then Director of Public Works Rob Houghton. Houghton sent the letter to several residents who had concerns about the county's decision to accept the biosolids.

Houghton wrote that the safety of accepting the biosolids had been clearly established over a decade at 11 major solid waste facilities in the state. He added that the California Integrated Waste Management Board revised state regulations at every solid waste landfill in California.

Of particular interest to Perley is the statement Houghton wrote about the percentage of solids.

"Only biosolids with a solids content in excess of 50 percent would be accepted," Houghton wrote. "It may be helpful to note that in practical terms, there is little difference between burying the biosolids and using them as daily cover."

According to Perley, sludge is only brought to the landfill four times a year and it is hard for him and the other service providers to understand why the county would have a problem accepting it.

"We just can't figure out what's going on here," he said Thursday.

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors meets at 9 a.m. the first four Tuesdays of each month at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas. For more information call 754-6370 or visit

co.calaveras.ca.us/cc/departments/supervisors.aspx.

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