

Valley Springs plan adopted, despite some objections

Written by [Michael Kay](#), [The Union Democrat](#) June 02, 2010 03:55 pm

Calaveras County's Board of Supervisors closed a final chapter in the multi-year debate over the future of development in Valley Springs with the approval of a community map to be included in the county's long-range planning process.

In a 4-1 vote, supervisors selected a map drafted over the last few weeks by Supervisor Gary Tofanelli with representatives from groups he chose to participate in the process.

"I don't think there's any group out there that got everything they wanted in this thing," said Tofanelli in his closing remarks.

The selection largely supersedes the land use map drafted through a three-plus-year formal public process led by the Calaveras Council of Governments, in conjunction with MyValleySprings.com and funded in part by a Caltrans grant of more than \$200,000.

A passionate coalition of opposition forces arose against the results of that process, first voting overwhelmingly to remove Rancho Calaveras from the plan's boundaries, then asking for Gold Creek and La Contenta subdivisions to be stripped, before demanding that the entire plan be rewritten.

The groups coalesced behind a conviction that individual property rights were being violated by the proposals, that outside agendas were at work and — despite extensive documentation from CCOG — that sufficient public outreach had not been conducted.

The adopted map uses the area's 1974 community plan as a foundation. It was then tweaked based on feedback from property owners in the area.

With the vote, the plan is destined to be analyzed in depth for concerns such as environmental impacts as part of the General Plan process. The CCOG map will be included as an alternative, but will not be examined in equal detail.

The vote came after nearly three hours of testimony from more than two dozen community members, most speaking in favor of the map ultimately adopted by the board.

Nevertheless, many gave impassioned defenses to the process that resulted in the CCOG map and questioned the product that lay before the supervisors.

Colleen Platt, of MyValleySprings.com, a grass-roots group of land-planning advocates, suggested there was no reason to believe that the map presented by Tofanelli's committee had any greater buy-in from the community than the previous one.

"The new map has not been reviewed or vetted by the community," said Platt.

Among the communities and concerned groups not represented in the meetings were La Contenta, Gold Creek and the Valley Springs Area Business Association.

Platt's group was invited to participate in the negotiations, but declined to do so, as members felt the process was not transparent, she and others explained.

But many lauded the process as respectful of property owners.

"We updated it by citizens for citizens," said Mike Wietrick, who participated in the three- to four-hour meetings over the map as a representative of Rancho Calaveras property owners.

The CCOG map represented only a sample of the people in the area, and did not include the most important voices, said Jeff Davidson, a property owner and Calaveras County Water District director representing the greater Valley Springs area.

"What they generated was a consensus of the people who attended the meetings," he said. "Unfortunately, the people who attended the meetings were not property owners."

Many of those involved in the CCOG process were dismayed at the procedures taken by those who drafted the plan adopted by the supervisors.

"It is extraordinary to think that a small, exclusive committee that meets in private can claim to represent the Valley Springs community," said Muriel Zeller, a former MyValleySprings.com board member.

Darren Spellman, a resident of Rancho Calaveras and candidate for Supervisor in District 5, suggested size does not matter.

"I don't care how many people get together and decide that it's a good idea — that doesn't make it right. The consent has to come from people who own the land," he said to applause.

Supervisor Merita Callaway, the lone vote against the map, questioned the completeness of the map's development. She urged that the CCOG map to be given equal consideration.

"I don't feel like I have enough information to have a preferred alternative," she said.

Tom Infusino, of the Calaveras Planning Coalition, also urged the board to equally review both plans.

"The spirit of debate over the competing plans would be enhanced by data," he argued.

County Planning Director George White said any such dual analysis would cost additional money.

The motion that was ultimately approved included the CCOG map only as a secondary, less thoroughly examined option.