

# BOARD DIVIDED OVER CORRALING 5-PLUS ACRE RANCHETTES

By **Dana M. Nichols**

February 16, 2012

Record Staff Writer

February 16, 2012 12:00 AM

SAN ANDREAS - The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors remains deeply divided over how and whether to reign in ranchette-style development, the 5- to 40-acre lots that have replaced cattle ranches in some areas.

Board differences surfaced again this week as the supervisors took their first look since 2010 at proposed land-use maps for a revised General Plan.

Supervisors Merita Callaway and Tom Tryon, who represent the relatively upscale portions of the county along Highway 4, voiced the strongest support for measures to preserve open space and large working ranches during a study session.

Tryon was vehement in his criticism of past policies that have allowed a sprawl of ranchettes and the creation of rural lots that could someday have homes built on them.

"What do you think the roads are going to have to look like to handle 40,000 people in Copperopolis?" Tryon asked. "That's about the population of Folsom. We need to be realistic about how many parcels we're going to create and how many homes we are going to build on them."

Pressure on property owners to carve up old ranches and sell them can be irresistible. Under zoning rules that set a 40-acre minimum lot size in ranching areas, a 400-acre ranch would be carved into 10 lots of 40 acres each, resulting in homes sprawled in such a way that it would be difficult to maintain public roads and other services.

County Planning Director Rebecca Willis suggested that supervisors consider a technique called clustering to preserve ranches while also allowing large ranch owners to sell some lots. Clustering would allow the owner of that same 400-acre ranch to create 10 smaller home lots, perhaps only 4 acres each, and to cluster those homes close to roads and utilities. That way, the rest of the ranch could stay in farm production.

The county's Agriculture Coalition, a group of ranchers and representatives of mining and timber interests, wants to use clustering as a method to preserve large ranches.

"It's a tool that landowners can have to use," said rancher Bob Garamendi, a member of the coalition.

Yet the values of large land owners collide with those of ranchette owners, some of whom see efforts by planners to encourage clustering as infringement on property rights.

"I like sprawl. I want to live in sprawl," said Tonja Dausend of Burson. "Government planning ... imposes sustainable development on future generations that may not want it."

The area from Burson to Valley Springs, in particular, has already pretty much been carved up into 5-acre house lots, according to county maps.

"The horses are out of the barn down there," Tryon said of the septic tank-oriented development west of Valley Springs.

Tryon called for officials to consider an even larger minimum lot size of 100 or 150 acres in ranching zones. He argued that would prevent areas near towns from breaking into such small lots that they are useless for large-scale subdivision development in the future.

Board Chairman Gary Tofanelli, who represents Valley Springs, Wallace and Burson, balked at the idea of a countywide minimum lot size that could make properties in his district undevelopable.

"I don't feel one size is going to fit all here," Tofanelli said. And the fact that land near Valley Springs is already more carved up than land near Murphys or Angels Camp is one reason for that, Tofanelli said. "You don't have large swaths of land there."

Supervisor Steve Wilensky, who represents Mountain Ranch, West Point and Mokelumne Hill, also called for a more flexible approach.

Callaway, responding to Tofanelli, questioned what a more flexible approach might mean, other than more sprawl like that near Valley Springs.

"Are you saying that because the horse is out of the barn, we should let it gallop all over the place?" Callaway said.

The board hopes by the end of this year to finalize maps for the county and by next year to adopt a new General Plan to guide growth and development.

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

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