

Plan update released after 8 years

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The 2014 Draft General Plan was released Friday and is available for public review and comment.

According to Planning Director Peter Maurer in his announcement of the General Plan update's release to the public, the draft plan consists of three primary components: the land use map that depicts the density and intensity of uses on all lands within the unincorporated portions of Calaveras County; the policy document, consisting of brief discussion of each element of the plan and the goals, policies, and implementation programs; and a background report, that provides some of the more detailed information that led to the development of the goals and policies document.

The General Plan update has been in the works for more than eight years and cost nearly \$2 million.

Release of the Draft General Plan begins a 90-day public review and comment period. During this time, a series of community workshops and other public meetings will be held. Staff encourages the county's citizens to review the draft, and provide written comments.

The draft is available online at planning.calaverasgov.us/GeneralPlanUpdate.aspx.

Comments can be submitted to the planning department in writing, by e-mail, or through the department's website.

At the end of the comment period, near the end of March, the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission will hold a series of hearings to consider public comment, and make any changes to the draft plan that the board feels is appropriate.

The draft plan is divided into eight sections, or elements:

Land Use – Identifies where different land uses should locate, and the density and intensity of those uses.

Circulation – Links the land uses with the ability to move people and goods, addressing not only the road system, but also pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

Housing – Addresses housing needs in the county, with policies and programs intended to provide housing for all segments of the County's populace.

Resource Production – An optional element addressing agriculture, timber, and mining.

Conservation and Open Space – Addresses a wide range of issues, including recreation, biological resources, water, soil, and cultural resources.

Noise – Considers noise issues associated with land uses and transportation and proposes standards to protect the county's citizens from excessive noise exposure.

Safety – Addresses hazards such as wildfire, flooding, and landslides.

Public Facilities and Services – Addresses water and sewer service, libraries, park facilities, and providing the services citizens need to build communities.

"While state law lays out a number of provisions that must be included in a general plan, there is great flexibility provided to the county to develop a plan that addresses our specific needs," Maurer said in his summary. "This draft plan tends to address the minimum requirements of state law, although goals and policies

addressing agriculture, economic development, and water supply have been included.

“It should be noted that this is just the first draft. Changes to policies and land use designations are expected once the public has a chance to review the draft and the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors has an opportunity to review it.

“Planning staff and its consultants have tried to take into consideration previous board direction, public comments that have been received throughout the update process, and agency input.”

The draft plan is intended to provide for the expected growth over the next 20 years. Approximately 9,000 new residents are expected to come to the county, based on projections by the state. This equates to the need for approximately 3,700 new residential units by 2035.

Growth rates have varied dramatically in the county over the past two decades. During the 1990s, the county population grew by 4.4 percent, while the average from 2000 to 2010 was 2.4 percent. In fact, the growth rate has been declining since the recession. Since 2010 the county has experienced a net loss in population of approximately 2.3 percent.

The draft plan takes this relatively slow growth into consideration, Maurer said. However, there is sufficient land in each land use category to accommodate five times the expected growth, using conservative build-out scenarios. The direction of the polities and land use designation is to direct the majority of future growth toward existing and planned communities where infrastructure and services exist, protecting the resource-based industries of agriculture, timber and mining, and promoting tourism.

One of the most controversial and complex aspects of this draft plan was dealing with the desire of many in the community to incorporate existing and proposed community plans. On Jan. 28, 2014, the Board of Supervisors held a workshop where this issue was discussed with the Planning Department. While no vote was taken, the general direction (although not everyone agreed) was that including the community plans into the General Plan update would take too much time, and could potentially create internal conflicts with the plan.

While independent community plans were not included as a part of this draft plan, many of the policies and land use designations have been incorporated, Maurer added.