

New outreach coordinator for Community Action Project

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The Calaveras Community Action Project, CAP for short, has a new Outreach Coordinator.

Austen Thibault will serve to communicate the actions and opinions of CAP and its community stewardship program, the Calaveras Planning Coalition, as the organization continues to advocate for citizen-approved community planning and development.

CAP is a non-profit organization focused on citizen participation in sustainable land use planning. Its Planning Coalition facilitates monthly meetings of concerned citizens and groups representing Calaveras County interests and strongly encourages anyone interested to participate. The next meeting of the CPC is Monday, March 7.

“We are fortunate to find someone who brings Austen's educational and local journalism experience to our organization,” said CAP co-chair Joyce Techel. “He starts out with a foundation in county and state issues, and existing local challenges such as fire safety, water availability and land use. He brings fresh eyes and new ideas to CAP/CPC's efforts to engage the public in working together for a Calaveras County that can thrive in these challenging times.”

A near-lifetime local, Thibault previously served as a reporter for The Union Democrat newspaper, writing extensively on local drought conditions and associated wildfires, as well as county government. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology: Ecology and Biodiversity and also spent several years as a field biologist for the US Forest Service, the university system, and other local nonprofits. This combined experience makes him familiar with land management and local, state, and federal government decision-making, while his time serving executive roles in university clubs familiarizes him with grassroots volunteer community organizing.

“I want nothing more than to see this community thrive,” Thibault said, “and we can do that through communication and cooperation. CAP's mission to directly involve citizens in their own governance and community stewardship is a mission that anyone can get behind. Self-governance is hard and we are sure to disagree at times, but so long as we value each other and the place we live, we can be all the stronger for it.”

CAP and its members of the Calaveras Planning Coalition were leading advocates for a comprehensive update to the General Plan, calling for a balance between new development and preservation of open space to support a strong economy while maintaining the county's rural character. After 13 years of advocacy that exhausted all administrative remedies, CAP had to take harsher measures when the county approved a General Plan that does not meet the requirements of state law.

On December 9, 2019, the CPC filed a case in Calaveras County Superior Court which convincingly argues that the Calaveras County supervisors violated state planning law and the California Environmental Quality Act. The “Petition for Writ of Mandate; Complaint for Injunctive and Declaratory Relief Pursuant to General Plan Law, the California Public Records Act, and the California Environmental Quality Act” can be viewed on the CAP/CPC website: www.calaverascap.com. Under “Planning Documents” select “Calaveras County General Plan Documents.”

The lawsuit is ongoing and may last up to five years. CAP and the Coalition will continue to update the public while communicating how the county is better served by a more comprehensive General Plan. CAP and the Coalition will also continue advocating for public participation in sustainable land use as the board of supervisors establishes and attempts to execute its General Plan implementation priorities.