

Divisive Valley Springs plan on life support

Vote put off while supervisor works to resolve conflict

By **Dana M. Nichols**
Record Staff Writer
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SAN ANDREAS - Like certain fictional residents of Transylvania, the Valley Springs Community Plan is neither dead nor alive.

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to leave it that way for at least another three weeks, despite warnings from the county's planning director that further delays will only increase county costs and possibly delay completion of the General Plan.

The board was scheduled Tuesday to decide whether to give the proposed Valley Springs plan full life by incorporating it into the county's General Plan. The alternative - a stake into the community plan's heart - would mean that the revised General Plan would instead look to a 1975 document for the old town center of Valley Springs.

A number of Valley Springs residents say they want the stake option.

Their reasons included concerns that proposed land-use changes could lower property values, the possibility that the plan would allow an increase in housing density and that many don't see themselves as residents of Valley Springs, even if the town name appears on their mailing address.

Some also see the proposed community plan as a scheme imposed by outside consultants who want to impose a "smart growth" pattern advocated by the California Department of Transportation.

"I would like all of those outside people to take all of their social engineering and do it someplace else," said Michale Weitrack of Burson.

A \$255,000 grant from Caltrans funded the effort to craft a new community plan for Valley Springs. The plan was intended to follow principles of rural "smart growth," an attempt to cluster homes near services such as roads and sewers as a way to reduce costs for taxpayers and environmental impacts.

Several supervisors said they were displeased with the process leading to the proposed plan, and that the county government - rather than the separate Calaveras Council of Governments - should have handled the project from the beginning.

"We got off track partly due to our own failings," Supervisor Steve Wilensky said.

Supervisor Tom Tryon noted that the proposed Valley Springs Community Plan included huge swaths of agricultural land as part of the town center - not something he feels is appropriate in a community plan.

"Why do we have a community center if we won't provide services?" Tryon asked.

But it appeared a narrow board majority - Supervisors Merita Callaway, Russ Thomas and Gary Tofanelli - were leaning toward adopting the map rather than risk reverting to the 1975 plan that doesn't include expanded commercial zones desired for economic growth.

In the end, however, Tofanelli asked the board to give him three more weeks to work on resolving conflicts with landowners and making changes to the map.

"I'd hate to see this money thrown down the tubes," Tofanelli said of the Caltrans grant. "I'm going to give this every chance I can."