

LITTLE CONSENSUS ON WHERE TO DRAW VALLEY SPRINGS BOUNDARIES

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May 11, 2008

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VALLEY SPRINGS - Here's a riddle with too many answers: How big is Valley Springs?

The original town site laid out in the late 1800s is 18 square blocks at the intersection of Highways 12 and 26. That area is dwarfed by the 95252 ZIP code that gives virtually everyone living between San Andreas and the San Joaquin County line a Valley Springs postal address. And just to make the riddle more difficult, neither the town area nor the ZIP code correspond to the 1974 community plan for Valley Springs; to local fire, water or sewer districts; to school attendance boundaries; or to the districts for elected officials representing the area.

"This is upsetting the psyche of a lot of people," said Alice Raine, chairwoman of the Rancho Calaveras County Service Area, and someone who has been active in land-use planning in the Valley Springs area for almost three decades.

That's because Valley Springs area residents are in the middle of a debate over what the boundaries of Valley Springs are and should be. The answer matters because Calaveras County officials are gearing up to revise both the county's General Plan and a community plan for Valley Springs. Those plans will guide how the community grows and changes in coming decades, including where new homes and businesses are built.

In the crossfire of that debate is the Greater Valley Springs Advisory Group, a recently-formed resident group that has been holding meetings and trying to suss out a consensus on a variety of land-use issues, including whether to preserve open space, economics, housing, safety and land use. The GVSAG, as folks here call it, will give the results to county officials to use in revising county plans this summer.

"The boundaries (topic) is getting more input than any of the other visions," said Diane Starner, Web site coordinator for GVSAG and a member of the boundaries committee.

Much of that input is shocked reaction to a map posted online showing a possibly community-planning boundary for Valley Springs that stretches from Toyon to Jenny Lind and includes the sprawling Rancho Calaveras housing subdivision along Highway 26 as well as some large ranches just east of Burson Road.

"I don't want to be in a city and I don't want to be in a community plan," said Hazel Cain, 83, who owns and operates a 170-acre ranch on Burson Road.

Lynn O'Connor, the county's General Plan coordinator, said county planners may grant Cain's request to be removed since her land is a large working ranch, unlike many nearby properties that have become primarily housing.

Some residents of Rancho Calaveras, which despite its name is dedicated to housing rather than ranching, also oppose being included in a community plan for Valley Springs.

Mikki Parks, a Rancho Calaveras resident, said she is concerned that defining Rancho Calaveras as part of the larger Valley Springs community is a step toward allowing commercial businesses and apartments into the area. And it also could be a step toward eventual creation of a town government, which would increase taxes.

"We absolutely do not need to be part of it," Parks said.

She said that in an hour of knocking on doors, she found 20 neighbors willing to sign a statement voicing their opposition to being included in the community plan.

Raine noted that Rancho Calaveras already has a special plan of its own that bans anything other than single-family homes within the 4,000-acre subdivision.

"The people in Rancho don't want any of their special plan touched," Raine said. She said the fear is that participating in community planning would eliminate the requirements that the neighborhood be a commerce- and apartment-free zone. "We want to remain within our selves."

County officials say participating in a community planning effort will in no way change the Rancho Calaveras special plan.

"That's beyond paranoia," Calaveras County Supervisor Bill Claudino said of the belief that a community plan would undermine the neighborhood's plan. "We just want to hear what people have to say."

Claudino represents the downtown and La Contenta portions of Valley Springs.

Meanwhile, residents who want to offer comments to the GVSAG have until May 19 to submit material that will be included in the group's report to county officials. County officials expect to begin their series of public meetings on the Valley Springs plan this summer.

"We are trying to pull the community together," said Starner, who is a Rancho Calaveras resident and who hopes her neighborhood participates in the community plan so residents there can have a say in the kinds of development that go in next door.

Still, Starner admits the issue of community identity and boundaries is complex.

"If people ask me where I live, I live in Valley Springs," Starner said. If people in town (i.e. the downtown Valley Springs shopping district) ask me, I am in Rancho, because it is somewhat separate."

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MORE INFORMATION

For information on the Greater Valley Springs Advisory Group, or to comment on planning the future of Valley Springs, go to www.gvsag.org

Comments on the group's preliminary vision statement are due by May 19. The group's next meeting is 7 to 9 p.m. May 29 at the Community United Methodist Church, 135 Laurel St., Valley Springs.

For information on Calaveras County's planning and community plan efforts, go to www.co.calaveras.ca.us/cc and click on Planning under the department quick pick list.