

Questions aplenty at the outset

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Updating the General Plan with Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission.
Enterprise photo by Colin Rigley

How will the new Calaveras County general plan affect community plans? How will community plans be incorporated into the new county master document?

These were the main questions asked during a joint panel of the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission.

Updating the current Calaveras County General Plan, which is about 30 years old, is a colossal task, but no one at the meeting wanted to see community plans get left in the dust.

Community plans are blank spaces in the existing general plan. They represent developed areas of the unincorporated county, such as Valley Springs and Murphys. Some community plans are just as old, if not older, than the current General Plan.

Several Valley Springs residents joked that their community plan contains sections devoted to railroad tracks running through the city. The problem is that there has not been any railroad in Valley Springs "for some time now."

Larry Mintier of Mintier and Associates, the Sacramento consulting firm hired to initiate the first phases in the general plan update, assured attendees that individual community needs would be assessed in the final general plan; it is actually a requirement under state law.

The question of how to include community plans sparked debate between several supervisors and Community Development Agency Director Stephanie Moreno.

"Our hope is to include it all into one main document," Moreno said.

"If you put all these community plans into the general (plan) I'm worried it'll be 20 years before we get anything adopted," Supervisor Tom Tryon said. Community plans for Valley Springs and San Andreas were given priority as they are the oldest. Supervisor Bill Claudino said that the main issue now is a lack of funding.

"I want to clarify that we're not talking about adopting isolated community plans separate from the general plan update. We're talking about taking community input and implementing site specific community ideas in the general plan at the same time we're doing the update," Moreno said.

The issue resulted in a great deal of confusion and disagreement between the supervisors and Moreno. Claudino recommended that a special study session be scheduled to handle the matter in order to focus on the general plan.

One attendee was concerned that current projects will impact how the general plan is implemented.

"Every project that goes forward that requires a general plan amendment and requires zoning changes on subdivisions forecloses options in terms of the future. I don't see how you can get around that," Steve Elias said.

John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, expressed concern over cumulative impacts within the county. Buckley said that it has now been two years since he initially came before the board urging the county to adopt cumulative impact assessments.

"The consultant very clearly talked about an upcoming baseline report Based on what was shown ... it is not clear that the report will actually answer some of the important questions as to what this board and the Planning Commission have already approved in recent years," Buckley said.

"We will be documenting most all of that in the background report, (although) I don't know we'll hit on every point," Mintier said.

"We continue to talk about how cumulative impact is something we must, by law, consider. But we haven't defined it, we haven't studied it, and we still can't tell people exactly what the total that's in front of us already is," Supervisor Steve Wilensky said.

Wilensky recommended that cumulative impact studies be included in the timeline for the first two phases of the update process.

A number of people worried about Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. They felt that the GIS maps being used so far were not taking key priorities into consideration. Certain geographical features had been listed as medium or low priority, but community members felt they deserved higher.

"Transportation right of ways, emergency evacuation routes, parking facilities, drainage systems, public utility facilities, schools, community centers, parks, fire stations, law enforcement stations and hospitals were all considered low priority for incorporation into the GIS system," Tom Infusino said.

Other issues that were addressed included global warming considerations, additional elements that could be added to the general plan, child care considerations, and public input in the process.

Not all the specific concerns were directly addressed by county officials.

Larry Mintier assured that global warming issues would be considered during the environmental review process.

Stephanie Moreno also noted that public input will be a vital part of the process. Many more similar public meetings will take place throughout the county over the next six weeks.

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