

## **Residents: No growth until plan is done**

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Don't keep approving projects that require General Plan amendments before a viable, updated plan is adopted.

That was the message repeated most at a joint Tuesday meeting of the Calaveras County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Residents and representatives of many community organizations spoke to a crowd of nearly 100 at the session, on the county's General Plan update process.

The county has already hired Mintier and Associates, a Sacramento consulting firm, to help outline how to go forward with the mammoth undertaking. The first document the county must prepare — by the end of August, to stay on its two-year timetable — is a baseline report. This is described as a snapshot of where the county is today in every regard.

Local governments have quite a bit of leeway in drafting general plans, Mintier said, as long as they are comprehensive, cover all geographic territory in the county, are internally consistent and address seven state-mandated elements: land use, circulation (including transportation), housing, conservation of natural resources, open space, noise and safety.

"We are concentrating on the mandatory elements now; optional elements will be scheduled on a different track due to the ambitious schedule we've set for ourselves," said Community Development Director Stephanie Moreno.

However, many resident and community concerns focused on elements the state apparently deems nonessential: health and human services, children and youth, historical landmarks, private property owners' rights, oak management policies and global climate change.

Representatives of unincorporated areas feared their individual community plans, which they've worked hard on, would be lost in the rush.

"We've spent so much time and had so many meetings to try to define our space. I just want to make sure we're paid attention to," said Bill Schmiett of Mountain Ranch.

The Copperopolis' community plan, spurred by private funding, is nearly finished. Valley Springs' plan is also progressing, but community plans can't be adopted before the countywide General Plan is in place. A heated debate over where communities fit in the

overall scheme of the update process led supervisors to call for a study session to clarify the issue.

"I'm an advocate of doing the General Plan first, then doing the community plans," District 4 Supervisor Tom Tryon said. "The more we put in this pot, the more stirring it'll require, the more money will be spent and the weaker the final product is going to be."

This caused even more protest on behalf of communities like Valley Springs — proposed home to 2,300 of the 6,000 new lots being considered in the county, and whose existing community blueprint still includes the railroad that went through town 30 years ago.

"Plans before projects," said Colleen Platt, member of MyValleySprings.com, a group of growth-concerned residents. "Projects requiring major changes should be put on the back burner until progress is made on the General Plan. We'd like a chance to have a say in planning our future before the option is taken away from us."

Moreno assured the audience that though the county has not decided exactly how individual community plans fit into the big picture, none will be left behind. Unfortunately, there is no legal way for the Community Development Department to stop working on building projects it has already begun processing, she added.

John Buckley, executive director of the Twain Harte-based Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, was concerned that Calaveras County does not have complete records on what projects have already been approved, and on those projects' cumulative effect on the environment and natural resources. He brought the same issue before the Board of Supervisors two years ago, he said.

"And yet you're moving forward, making decisions for the future, without having basic information on changes that have brought you to that point," Buckley said.

District 2 Supervisor Steve Wilensky acknowledged the county is fumbling, and that it will continue to burn energy on short-term solutions until funding allows officials to hire more staff — or free up employees they have to work on long-term planning. Everyone is stretched thin, he said, trying to work on moving forward while still juggling a full workload.

District 1 Supervisor Bill Claudino agreed the board needs to step back and iron out inconsistencies before it is able to give direction to the Planning Commission or its own departments.

"We can't expect the Community Development agency to do a job they have no description of," he said.

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