

VS community planning revs up once again

By Claudette Langley

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Jeff Goldman of EDAW listens to Shaelyn Stratton, county planner, explain procedure to the crowd gathered at Valley Springs Elementary School for a community plan design workshop in May. Enterprise photo by Claudette Langley

How big Valley Springs will be in the future is the main focus of a special planning workshop this week.

The Calaveras Council of Governments is calling on all Valley Springs residents who want to help determine the boundaries for their town to show up at 6 p.m. Thursday at Valley Springs Elementary School. The workshop is a follow-up to five days of planning workshops, seminars and drop-in sessions held at the end of May. While that week created a vision of what Valley Springs might become, on Thursday some decisions will be made.

“This may be the most important public meeting in the process to date,” said Tyler Summersett, CCOG transportation planner. “People will get a clear sense of what a community plan is, why it’s important to them, and be able to participate in the selection of the preferred boundary alternative.”

According to Summersett, EDAW, the community plan design consultants, have determined that a conservative population projection for greater Valley Springs is more than 30,000 residents.

“The community plan update proposes to address recent issues, both within and outside the community, including the pace of growth, economic changes and regional and statewide initiatives,” Summersett said.

He added that a community plan might impose more conditions on development than the county's general plan. For example, he said, in a community plan residents can designate historic areas, set architectural standards or even encourage green-building techniques.

During the five-day process in May, residents heard the results of a survey, identified their favorite areas in Valley Springs and created maps showing the preferred boundaries for the town.

EDAW sent out more than 5,000 surveys to residents in the Valley Springs area and approximately 700 were returned. From the 700, consultants gleaned some trends, including a list of places considered most personally favored.

New Hogan Reservoir topped the list that respondents deemed as a favorite spot in the area. Their homes ran a close second.

The survey also revealed that shopping and services needed the most improvement, with roads and traffic congestion close behind. Housing choices and bicycle lanes appeared to be the least worrisome issues.

Despite the more than 10 percent return rate, there were some tough sells in the crowd that gathered at the May 30 design workshop.

Several residents who identified themselves as being from the surrounding areas questioned the validity of the survey. They said that an unsigned anonymous document would just not do and couldn't set the course for the town.

"Why, anybody could just walk in here off the street and start drawing boundary lines," Hazel Caine said May 30. "We need to get the signatures of the property owners who would be affected by the new boundaries."

After a long meeting of the minds May 30, the group got down to business and created the boundary maps. Summersett said five groups tackled the task and, of those, one included every area from Jenny Lind to Burson, one kept the area as is and three of them included Valley Springs proper, La Contenta and Rancho Calaveras.

"There wasn't really a consensus, but the majority seemed to favor Valley Springs proper, La Contenta and Rancho," Summersett said.

The workshop, "Planning for the Future," will run from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Thursday in the Multipurpose Room at Valley Springs Elementary School, 240 Pine St., Valley Springs. For more information call Summersett at 754-2094 or visit calacog.org and click on "projects" then "Valley Springs CBTP."

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