

Valley Springs gets lessons in smart growth

By Nick Baptista

Valley Springs area residents received a crash course on "Smart Growth" principles Wednesday evening when more than 200 people attended the MyValleySprings.com and the Foothill Conservancy forum at Valley Springs Elementary School.

Paul Zykovsky, director of Land Use and Transportation Programs for the Local Government Commission, was the featured speaker and he outlined "10 Principles of Smart Growth and Livable Communities."

Wednesday's presentation was the first in a series of programs MyValleySprings.com and the Foothill Conservancy plan to offer to bring citizens into the process for revising the Valley Springs Community Plan and the Calaveras County General Plan.

The next presentation is tentatively scheduled for March 29th.

The principles, which Zykovsky attributed to the "Ahwahnee Principles" developed in 1991, begin with the preservation of open space, farms and the area's natural beauty.

Zykovsky's second principle was to strengthen and direct development toward existing communities. He advocated the preservation and repair of existing historic buildings and revitalization of town centers. He added that communities should look toward clustering homes and development closer together to reduce runoff and the cost of providing services and infrastructure.

Zykovsky's third principle was taking advantage of compact building design. As the overall population increases in age, more compact development on smaller lots and within walking distance of services will become desirable, he said.

Along those same lines, a mixture of land uses with retail and personal services near housing was Zykovsky's fourth principle.

He displayed examples of housing located over retail shops and restaurants, including a recent development in Murphys with housing situated over its Main Street shops.

Zykovsky's fifth principle was to foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place. His sixth principle was to provide housing opportunities and choices for different income levels and stages of life. This includes a mixture of housing types from single-family homes to four-plexes and cottages within the same housing development and he added, "Affordable housing doesn't mean poor quality."

The creation of "walkable communities" was Zykovsky's seventh principle. He showed how communities could create safe, walkable streets, improved crosswalks and the benefit of roundabouts for vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

Similarly, Zykovsky's eighth principle was that communities should provide a variety of transportation choices including bicycling, walking and public transit.

His ninth principle was to make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective. He said communities should target growth areas in their communities and make it clear to developers where they want to see development. State-of-the-art development codes and simplified land-use tables will enhance and expedite the review process, he added.

Zykovsky's final principle was to encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions. He said Wednesday's full house was a step in the right direction.

Stephanie Moreno, the county's Community Development Agency director, encouraged the public to get involved in the General Plan update process that is under way and predicted the update of the Valley Springs Community Plan "will be one of the most challenging" based on the community's diversity.

She added that the dates of upcoming General Plan hearings for Valley Springs would be announced soon.

Printed in The Valley Springs News on Friday, March 2, 2007