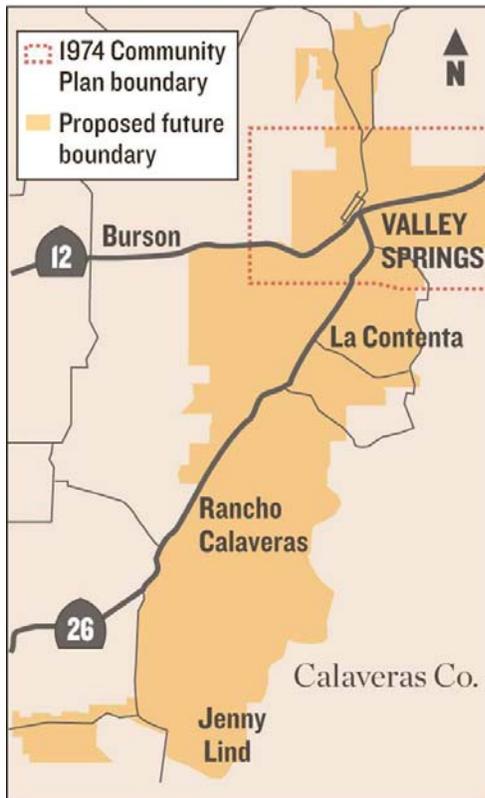


Valley Springs plan to include Rancho Calaveras

Future plan of boundaries

Valley Springs residents this week decided to include all of the area's most populous housing tracts with the Valley Springs Community Plan.



Source: Calaveras Council K. FIRTH/The Record

By **Dana M. Nichols**
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Record Staff Writer

VALLEY SPRINGS - Rancho Calaveras is part of Valley Springs.

That was the conclusion this week of a majority of the more than 120 Valley Springs area residents who participated Thursday night in a spirited public meeting on the question. As a result of that deliberation, all the housing tracts from Rancho Calaveras up Highway 26 to the historic downtown of Valley Springs will be included in a soon-to-be drafted community plan aimed at improving traffic circulation, establishing development standards and reviving downtown Valley Springs.

Including Rancho Calaveras - the massive 6,000-acre subdivision stretching along Highway 26 - was controversial.

Some Rancho Calaveras residents fear that being part of the larger community plan might ultimately force them to pay more taxes to install improvements such as sewers and sidewalks. Others fear that the longtime tradition of keeping livestock and raising 4-H projects on their one- to three-acre lots might be disrupted if Rancho Calaveras was forced to comply with standards acceptable in other parts of Valley Springs.

And, critics added, Rancho Calaveras already has its own plan - called a specific plan - intended to keep the neighborhood in its present state.

"If nothing changes in Rancho, I'm totally fine with that," Rancho Calaveras resident Darren Spellman said during Thursday's public meeting in the multipurpose room at Valley Springs Elementary School.

Advocates of all the area's major housing developments note that the residents in all of them must drive to the commercial district around the intersection of Highways 4 and 26 to shop. Rancho Calaveras, in particular, has no stores at all and no way for residents to buy food or other necessities without driving.

Consultants hired to facilitate creation of the community plan said that the Rancho Calaveras Specific Plan could be changed only by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, and that taxes could not be increased in the subdivision unless residents there voted to do it.

"The plan itself is not an assessment district," said Jeff Goldman of EDAW, the company facilitating the community plan. "That is up to the property owners."

At least some Valley Springs residents, including some Rancho Calaveras dwellers, say they favor raising community standards and installing improvements such as sidewalks.

"So our kids can ride bikes," said Sherri Reusche, a resident of Rancho Calaveras and a member of the Calaveras Unified School District Board of Trustees.

A \$204,648 grant from the California Department of Transportation is funding the effort by the Calaveras Council of Governments to draft a plan that would guide development of Valley Springs over the next 20 to 30 years. Among the tentative proposals for the plan are redevelopment and beautification of the historic downtown and a Highway 12 bypass that would carry traffic to the south of where that road currently meets Highway 26 at a cramped intersection controlled by stop signs.

Valley Springs' existing community plan was crafted in 1974 and included only a relatively small area around the historic downtown. Most of the area's population lives outside the boundaries of that plan.

Ultimately, the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors will decide whether to approve the new community plan. County officials have generally said they support allowing Valley Springs residents to decide how they want their community to grow.

Thursday's voting was conducted using hand-held electronic devices with numbered buttons. Participants were able to cast votes a number of times, with the results showing immediately on a screen at the front of the room.

"This is an overwhelming vote; more than half the people of the room in favor of including Rancho Calaveras," said Jeff Henderson, a consultant with EDAW.

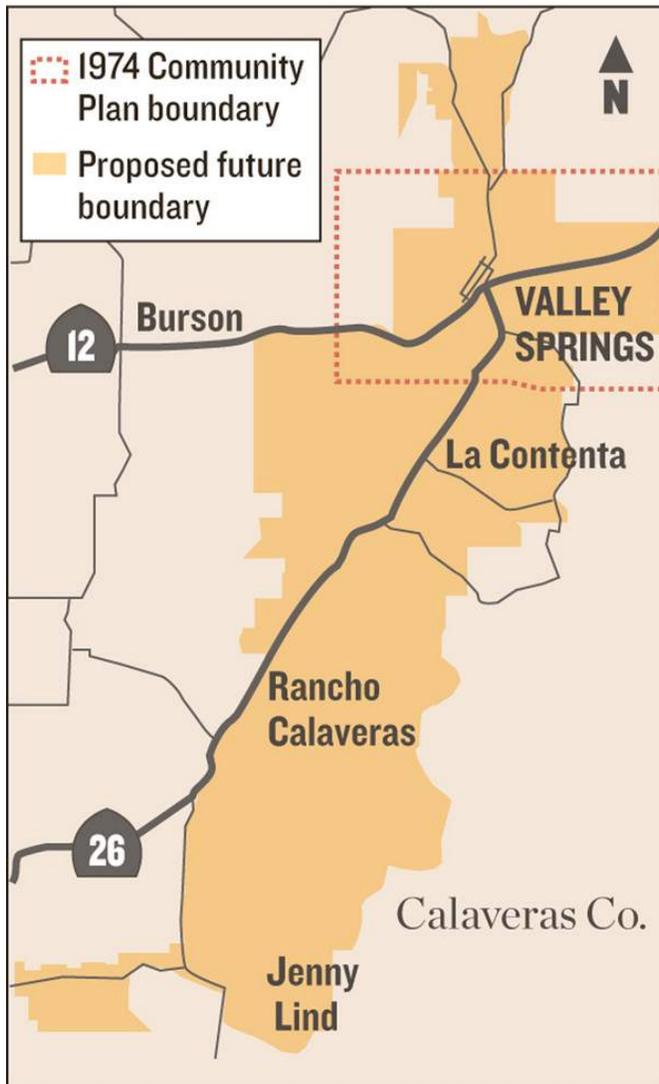
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Valley Springs Community Plan

For more information on the Valley Springs Community Plan that is now being drafted, go to www.calacog.org/vs_cbtp.shtml.

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