

Valley Springs planning process wraps up for now

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Five days of meetings end with a vision for the town

By Claudette Langley

The first phase of a multiyear Valley Springs community planning process ended last week in a packed room at Valley Springs Elementary School.

For nearly a week, planning experts and staff from the Calaveras Council of Governments held meetings and drop-in sessions to give residents the chance to redesign their community. Last Tuesday, the collective brainstorming resulted in maps showing a variety of circulation plans and a brightly colored blueprint for a vibrant downtown village area.

"Today is the culmination of five days of interactive meetings and sessions," said Jeff Goldman of EDAW, the consulting firm developing the plan. "We took everything from the meetings, went away for a few days, and worked furiously to put it all together."

Goldman told the crowd the work had just begun and that once his staff gets a sense of the direction, they will go back and work on a draft of the plan. He gave a target date of April 2010 for completion and submission to the county for integration into the general plan update.

Many of the priorities set by residents in this round of planning were similar to those in the 1974 Valley Springs Community Plan, according to Paul Zykovsky, director of land use and transportation with the Local Government Commission. LGC is a nonprofit that works with communities to help create sustainable,

eco-friendly plans.

"There appear to be some constant themes that have carried over from 1974," Zykovsky said. Of those, protection of the town's surrounding open space and trees seemed to top the list. Thirty-five years ago and today, the country lifestyle provided in Valley Springs appears to be the main reason many residents call the town home.

The area's steep slopes, wildlife corridors, sensitive species, viewscapes, unique features and abundance of trees were valued highly by those contributing to the plan.

Last Tuesday, residents were treated to a visionary blueprint of the village area that included a strong commercial area surrounded by high-density and low-density housing and plenty of open space.

The identity of the Valley Springs village included being a compact walkable, friendly small town with a distinct historic core and enhanced economic opportunity surrounded by open space.

During the five-day process, 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 who gathered at the May 30 design workshop.

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

"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. Tyler Summersett, transportation planner with CCOG, 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.

Those five maps graced the walls of the multipurpose room Tuesday for everyone to view and consider.

EDAW will take all of the ideas, maps and information gathered over the five-day process for use in developing the plan. For more information on the Valley Springs Community Plan meetings visit calacog.org/vs_cbtpl.shtml.

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