
Frequently Asked Questions about the Valley Springs Community Plan

Why is the Valley Springs Community Plan being updated?

Calaveras County has a long history of community planning initiated by dedicated groups of residents. In 2007, MyValleySprings.com organized a two-day community design workshop with the help of the Local Government Commission. Workshop participants discussed important community issues, such as preservation of rural character, circulation in and around Valley Springs, appropriate land uses around the town center, infrastructure needs, and economic redevelopment. In 2008, the Calaveras Council of Governments, in partnership with the Calaveras County Planning and Public Works Departments, Local Government Commission, and MyValleySprings.com, applied for and received a grant from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for \$250,000 to revise the Valley Springs Community Plan (VSCP), addressing the interconnectivity of land use, circulation, and community character and design.

There seems to be a lot of other planning going on right now. How does the Valley Springs Community Plan fit in with the countywide General Plan update?

The update of the existing Calaveras County General Plan includes a comprehensive review of all the required Elements (Land Use, Circulation, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, Safety, and Housing) and existing Community and Special Plans, and the development of three new General Plan Elements (Water, Agriculture & Forestry, and Economic Development). As part of the General Plan update, Community and Special Plans will be reformatted and edited for consistency and relevance with the General Plan revisions, but will not be significantly revised. In addition, both Community and Special Plans will be incorporated into the General Plan, rather than remain as stand-alone documents.

Concurrent with the General Plan Update, some communities have initiated a review of their existing Community Plans (e.g., Valley Springs, San Andreas, and Mokelumne Hill), and several more have organized to develop community visions that will provide direction for future development. In addition, one community, Copperopolis, is completing a 17-year-long journey to complete their Community Plan. Those Community Plans, updates, and visions that are completed in time will be reviewed as part of the Environmental Impact Report for the General Plan Update and incorporated within the Community and Special Plans section of the adopted General Plan. Those Community Plans that are not completed in time will need to go through a separate environmental review and be adopted by the Board of Supervisors as part of the normal General Plan Amendment process.

The Valley Springs community has demonstrated a desire to overhaul its 12-page Community Plan, originally drafted in 1974. A lot has changed in 25 years and the General Plan Update process seems to have given Valley Springs the opportunity to reflect and begin planning for the next 25 years.

How will the Rancho Calaveras Special Plan be affected if Rancho Calaveras is included?

Inclusion of Rancho Calaveras within the Valley Springs Community Plan (VSCP) boundaries would have no effect on the land use designations and associated zoning, as designated by the Rancho Calaveras Special Plan.

What information will be in the Valley Springs Community Plan?

The VSCP will follow the same format as all of the other Community Plans in the General Plan update. There will be six main sections, as follows:

- **Section 1 - Location:** The VSCP will begin with a brief description and map of the plan boundaries and area.
- **Section 2 - Vision:** The VSCP vision will describe how the plan contributes to the overall countywide Vision Statement and Guiding Principles. When the VSCP is updated, the vision statement will be developed or amended as part of a public outreach process to ensure an opportunity for input from all community stakeholders.
- **Section 3 - Profile:** The VSCP will include a description of development and planning history, distinguishing features, predominant land uses, and major transportation routes.
- **Section 4 - Issues:** This subsection will identify concerns, such as historic districts, that are specific to the VSCP area.
- **Section 5 - Land Use Designations:** The VSCP will include a brief description of how the countywide land use designations relate to the plan area.
- **Section 6 - Community Policies and Programs:** The goals, policies, and implementation programs of the VSCP will supplement countywide goals and policies in the General Plan. They will address issues or conditions unique to the Valley Springs area. State law requires that these policies be consistent with the countywide General Plan goals and policies. The policies and programs will be organized according to the overall GPU element/chapter structure.

The VSCP will need to use the same land use designations adopted under the countywide General Plan Update. Once the Valley Springs Community Plan is adopted, or as part of its incorporation into the updated General Plan, the County will review the countywide Land Use Diagram and amend it to reflect the new Valley Springs land use designations, as appropriate.

What types of issues will be addressed by Valley Springs Community Plan policy?

The General Plan is an overall vision for the entire county as a whole, not each individual community. It looks at the “big picture”, rather than the specific needs of each area. Community Plans are often used as the tool for implementing the broad intents of the General Plan on a local level. Where are the community boundaries? What policies need to be in place to direct local growth? What are the community’s goals and objectives? How will local policy be implemented...what has priority? Who is responsible for making it happen? A Community Plan allows local communities to personalize the General Plan requirements to their particular needs. Community plans can address a wide range of local issues, including historic preservation; community design; streetscapes; sidewalk, pedestrian trails, and nature trail networks, locations, and design; location of major land uses; location of major roadway features, such as intersection improvements, connectors and bypasses; and other issues of local concern. The community plan can set up processes for economic development, town hall meetings, and annual reports to the Board of Supervisors. It can establish policies for the county government interaction with community organizations or businesses. A Community Plan allows the residents to outline their vision for the community and to define where and how it will occur.

How would a community plan affect new development?

A Community Plan is an addition to the General Plan and must be consistent with its requirements. The Community Plan can only include requirements that are equal to, stricter than, or not covered by the General Plan. The plan could establish specific development standards for specific areas or for open space and natural resource conservation in new subdivisions; require stricter setbacks or dedication of parkland; or establish land use designations that increase or restrict the density of new development. For example, it could designate an historic district or identify buildings with historic or local significance. It could then create development standards for restoration, rehabilitation, or demolition criteria for the identified buildings, or for development within the district.

How would a community plan affect existing neighborhoods?

The General Plan identifies the general use of property (land use designations) and the compatible zoning for all unincorporated areas of the county. Through a Community Plan, land use designations can be used to support the way a community wants to develop. For example, a piece of property currently designated Residential - Rural, with a 5-acre minimum parcel size, might be changed to Residential – Low Density, with a 1/2-acre minimum, if the community decides it wants more residential housing in a particular area. It can also work the other way...a parcel designated Residential – Rural, with a 5-acre minimum, could be re-designated Agricultural Lands, with a 40-acre minimum, if the community decides this is the best way to protect its agricultural land.

These changes would not make current permitted uses illegal. In cases where existing uses are inconsistent with the new designations, the uses would become what is known as “legal non-conforming uses.” They would be allowed to continue until such uses are expanded, discontinued for a period of one year, or until the owner decides to change to a different use allowed under the new designation. However, if existing non-conforming uses are discontinued for a year or more, future use of the land or structures must conform to County General Plan/Community Plan and zoning provisions that are in place at the time the change occurs.

How is agricultural land protected?

As noted above, a Community Plan can change the land use designations to limit or expand uses allowed in specific areas. The General Plan will address countywide agricultural land protection through new land use designations, a separate Agriculture/Forestry Element, and other integrated policies. The VSCP can identify the way agricultural areas within its boundaries are developed with a specific policy or implementation program. For example, the community plan could have an implementation program that states ... “the County shall work with a local land trust or other organization to preserve land with agricultural, natural resource, and open space values significance to the community.” Policies or programs should support and contribute to the overall vision and goals of both the General Plan and the VSCP.

Can a community plan have its own development standards?

Yes. A community plan can include development standards that relate to specific local conditions. For example, the VSCP could include development standards that address energy efficiency, conservation,

or elements of design, which would apply to some or all new subdivisions. Any new development standards created for a community plan must be consistent with both the County Zoning Code and updated General Plan, and cannot be less stringent than existing county minimums.

What types of infrastructure are needed and what would related effects be?

There are various elements that determine the level of infrastructure needed to maintain a community and support future development. The County General Plan and Zoning Code establish minimum parcel sizes and maximum densities, based, in part, on the availability of public water and sewer. For example, parcels zoned Single Family Residential (R1) have the following minimum parcel sizes: 5 acres with well and septic; 1 acre with public water and on-site septic; and 7,000 square feet with public water and sewer. Costs and demand are obviously factors for the utility providers. Therefore, it is important to consider the availability of existing public utility infrastructure and plans for future expansion when identifying community plan boundaries, as this will seriously affect the potential for new development. In addition, the location of existing infrastructure or planned future expansion provides an indication of where future growth is most likely to occur.

How will my taxes change if my property is included?

Inclusion in a community plan area would not directly result in tax changes. There may be indirect effects, such as increased development in some areas that would raise the value of certain property or require increased services that would necessitate a tax or fee increase. A special assessment district may also be developed to fund certain local issues identified in the community plan. However, the creation of a special assessment district would only apply to and be voted on by those residents who would benefit from it. For example, an assessment district could be created to plant street trees and install decorative lighting around the existing town center. An assessment district boundary would be drawn to include the areas receiving street trees and lighting and the residents within that boundary would vote on whether they support taxing themselves to fund such improvements. Residents outside of the assessment district boundary would not be allowed to vote because their taxes would not be affected, regardless of the outcome.

When I bought this property, I was told I could divide it; now I can't. What about my property rights?

In California, the courts have repeatedly held that development in the state is a privilege, not a right. This includes the right to divide existing parcels. Intent is not considered an action. A Community Plan or General Plan Update can change the land use designation of a piece of property, which could also result in a change in zoning, reducing or eliminating the potential to divide or develop a parcel in the way that might have been allowed when the property was purchased. It is also possible that a change would make it possible to develop a parcel in a way that wasn't allowed before. This is why it is so important for local citizens to make their concerns known and be involved in the Community Plan development process.

What if I don't like the changes proposed in the Community Plan?

Developing a Community Plan is a lengthy legal process that strives to consider the opinions and desires of all those live and own property within the community boundaries. However, there will always be

those who do not agree with the vision for community growth or the way the final document treats their land. Therefore, just as with the General Plan, there are ways for individual owners and/or developers to request a change, through a zoning and/or Community Plan amendment. Although approval is not guaranteed, it does allow the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to consider unique circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

Is a community plan the first step towards incorporation?

No. A community plan is not required for and does not represent the first or any subsequent step towards incorporation as a city.