

CALAVERAS CATCHES UP WITH BACKLOG OF PERMITS

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SAN ANDREAS - Calaveras County's top planning official today will report some good news to the county's elected Board of Supervisors: a backlog of development and land use applications dating to the boom years before 2008 has been cleared and her department is now promptly processing new applications.

"We want economic development," Planning Director Rebecca Willis said last week after she and Planner Andy Mogensen presented the same report to the Planning Commission.

At its peak just after the 2008 crash in the housing market, the backlog was more than 200 applications, officials said at the time. Now, although there are some project applications that date back to the middle of the last decade, planners refer to those as "pending" rather than backlogged because they are on hold at the request of the applicants or waiting for applicants to provide necessary studies.

No longer are projects that are ready to go left sitting on desks due to lack of attention from county planners, Willis said.

One recent example: A propane company's application for a use permit to install several 30,000-gallon storage tanks in an industrial park in San Andreas was approved by the Planning Commission on Aug. 8, just a few months after the paperwork was filed.

"We are business-friendly," Mogensen said.

Mogensen said that the Planning Department received 1,499 applications for various zoning changes, land use changes, parcel maps and permits since 2001. He said 1,427 of those projects completed processing.

Of the 72 projects remaining, 22 are on hold at the request of the applicant, 30 are awaiting information from the applicant, three are in limbo because of a bank repossession or ownership change, and seven are projects in the Forest

Meadows subdivision that are stalled because they lack a sewer line and an environmental impact report.

The remaining 10 projects are what planners call "current," meaning they were filed recently and are moving smoothly to completion.

Planners say they don't anticipate ever again having such a large backlog. For one thing, county code now requires that applicants must make progress on their projects within six months or have the application go dormant.

That was not true during the real estate boom of the mid-2000s. That means many projects stayed on the books even when the applicants had died or the land had been repossessed by a bank.

Also, the county is trying to update its General Plan to reflect reality on the ground. Right now, much of the county's land is designated for types of development that are actually not legally possible due to problems ranging from lack of roads to steep terrain.

As a result, some property owners over the years applied for projects that never turned out to be viable.

"We do have some projects where we can't make them work," Willis said.

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