

# Latest General Plan update expenses draw public ire

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ Feb. 27, 2013

The slow and costly Calaveras County General Plan update came under public criticism at Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting.

The board's consent agenda, which usually has matters expected to be routine and non-controversial, contained two General Plan update expenditures that were lifted for further discussion.

The first matter called for the county to transfer \$10,799 to an already approved contract of \$299,960 with Raney Planning & Management of Sacramento to complete portions of the General Plan update document and prepare a General Plan Environmental Impact Report.

The second General Plan expenditure was for \$115,793 to the law firm of Remy Moose Manley to provide legal advice on the update.

The General Plan update has been in the works for more than six years. The board at the time had set a two-year timeframe to complete the task.

The county spent \$939,000 with the update's former consultant, Mintier Harnish, before discharging the Sacramento firm from any further services and bringing the project in house.

Kathy Mason of Murphys questioned the additional expenditure of nearly \$11,000 to Raney Planning & Management. She felt the General Plan update was undermining individual property rights and said "don't throw good money after bad."

County Planning Director Rebecca Willis explained the transfer was what remained from an earlier consulting contract with Raney and it would be used for work on the update.

Mason's concerns about the details of the update can be addressed when it comes up for public hearings, Willis added.

Joe Kelly of Copperopolis questioned the wisdom of transferring the unspent money from a previous work agreement so the consultant can now do more work on the General Plan update.

The board did not authorize the Raney transfer request. A motion to follow the staff recommendation failed due to the lack of a second.

However, the \$115,793 agreement with Remy Moose Manley was unanimously approved.

Mason questioned the necessity to have so many attorneys review the General Plan documentation. She termed it "a lawyers' cabal."

Board Chairwoman Merita Callaway said the attorney review was a necessary expense in the General Plan update process and the county did not have enough attorneys on staff to do so.

“We have no choice,” Callaway said.

“That’s what these firms charge,” she said later.

District 2 Supervisor Chris Wright said the legal expense is equal to a quarter of the county library budget, but “it’s an unavoidable cost.”

District 4 Supervisor Debbie Ponte asked what was the process in selecting Remy Moose Manley and whether it went out to bid.

County Counsel Janice Elliott said it did not go out to bid and Remy Moose Manley was selected based on prior General Plan work with the county since 2006. She added the firm has always given timely advice and did not overcharge for its work.

The firm looks at issues that could cause litigation in the future and be more costly to the county in the long run, Elliott said.