

# Take a Lode Off: General Plan draft to be released in October

Posted: Tuesday, September 23, 2014 6:00 am

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Drumroll please. Release of a public review draft of the updated Calaveras County General Plan is imminent. After eight years and consultant fees exceeding \$1 million, Planning Director Peter Maurer announced at the Aug. 14 Planning Commission meeting and in a memo to the Board of Supervisors that the draft General Plan will be released in October. The General Plan is the county's guide to future growth and development. Maurer confirmed that the information in the memo is still current.

Updating the General Plan has been a long and costly road of false starts, do-overs and missed deadlines. The biggest hiccup was when the Mintier-Harnish Planning Consultants contract was allowed to expire at the end of 2011.

Former Planning Director Rebecca Willis had advised supervisors in November 2012 to replace Mintier-Harnish with Raney Planning and Management, which they did. Brenda Gillarde, the General Plan coordinator at the time, said, "Raney will help us get to the finish line faster." Subsequently, the county contracted with Augustine Planning Associates to work on the plan, and that contract was extended in May 2014. Apparently, Raney could not get us to the finish line at all without help.

Seven planning directors in eight years, multiple consultants and high staff turnover in general have resulted in a lack of continuity where the General Plan update is concerned. There has not been a smooth continuum of direction that reflects the General Plan update process from beginning to end. There is no institutional memory, but there has been revisionist history. It's like the old game where something is whispered from one person to the next until it gets back to the first person, who cannot reconcile what he originally said with what he finally hears.

The original whisper came from the people during a multitude of countywide public workshops at the beginning of the process. The extent of the distortion remains to be seen, but it is the people who have remained constant in their primary desire to preserve the county's rural character and have their community plans included in the General Plan.

In his memo, Maurer recommends the supervisors do not include community plans in the General Plan update. He feels the supervisors understand the "challenges and complexities that, including the community plans, would pose to the process of adopting a new general plan." It sounds as if nonspecific community plan policies will be evidenced in the general plan by reference and specific policies, if they do not create an internal conflict, will be included in the Land Use Element.

The treatment of the community plans is a compromise of sorts, but it remains to be seen if the people will accept that compromise, which will likely depend on how well they believe Maurer has captured their community visions. In addition, there are the challenging communities of Copperopolis and Valley Springs. For example, how will Maurer reconcile the Valley Springs Community Plan document that is the result of a public process led by the Calaveras Council of Governments with the Tofanelli Committee document, which was created by appointees of then-Super-visor Tofanelli, but without any sanction from the Board of Supervisors?

Then there are those who will challenge the very concept of land use planning as a threat to private property rights. The state of California requires the county to have a general plan, so, please, take that fight to the state, and let's not waste our time debating whether we have the right to plan "for other people's property." We have the obligation to plan for the development of our communities, so let's focus on that.

Maurer is delaying the preparation of the General Plan environmental impact report (EIR), because he doesn't want to spend time and money for an EIR on a draft general plan that hasn't received the supervisors' stamp of approval. After a period of public review, he anticipates an accepted draft plan by late January or early February, which is when Raney would begin work on the EIR. There is, of course, the possibility of two new supervisors in January. If so, let's hope those two don't convince a third to support yet another do-over.

Assuming the Mintier-Harnish administrative draft plan was not thrown in the garbage, the draft plan to be released in October will be a conglomeration from three consulting firms and seven planning directors. Will it be a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth or seven planning director's heads are better than one? We'll soon find out. After eight years, there seems to be a growing consensus to just get the plan done. But getting it done doesn't mean it's going to be finished.

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