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August 2, 2018

For Immediate Release

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Public Comments Indicate Deficiencies in the Draft General Plan EIR

San Andreas. Many members of the public attended Calaveras County's first General Plan draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) meeting Tuesday night, July 31. They commented on the DEIR and asked the County to make a commitment to reduce the estimated two dozen significant impacts from growth under the draft General Plan. These significant impacts would be on traffic, fire safety, water delivery, sewer capacity, agricultural lands, oak woodlands, historic resources, noise, air quality, and wildlife habitat. The speakers addressed their comments to Planning Director Peter Maurer, who moderated the discussion at the Board of Supervisors' Chamber.

"Policies that do not commit to reduce impacts are not mitigation measures," proclaimed Marti Crane of Valley Springs. She went on to list seven examples when draft General Plan Update mitigation measures improperly included non-committal language such as "shall consider", "at the County's discretion", "encourage," and "should." Ms. Crane added, "The people of Calaveras County deserve straight talk. The County needs to say yes when it means yes and no when it means no."

Her comments were echoed by Penny Sarvis of Murphys. Speaking about the County's proposal to complete a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Ms. Sarvis noted that the mitigation measure included no timelines,

methods, standards or reporting procedures to ensure that implementation will be completed. She concluded, "I fear it won't happen."

Heidi Beswick, staff scientist for the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC), also complained that the mitigation measures are compromised by "caveats" and "weak language." She provided examples of how to properly phrase measures to reduce impacts to riparian woodlands and wildlife corridors.

To demonstrate the need to mitigate traffic safety impacts, Joyce Techel of MyValleySprings.com provided a map identifying the 1,537 traffic accidents throughout Calaveras County from 2011-2016, including the 34 fatalities. She exclaimed, "Accident rates measure the level of safety. We can no longer accept the failure to fund our roads!"

Jack Norton described many areas of concern about development impacts to agriculture, forestry, and minerals, concluding simply, "A general plan is expected to be clear and not vague."

Calaveras Planning Coalition Facilitator Tom Infusino provided a list of eight state and federal programs with funds available to help fixed-income seniors to maintain their homes, to lower water and sewer rates, to maintain agricultural and forest lands in production, to strengthen the local economy, and to provide for parks and wildlife habitat. He concluded, "If you put these actions into your plan, then you won't have 25 significant impacts from your plan."

To demonstrate the silliness of a government using weak language to address such serious issues, CSERC Director John Buckley quipped, "You don't 'encourage' people to pay taxes, and you don't 'consider' obeying the law." He concluded by reminding the Planning Director that adopting "feasible and meaningful" mitigation measures will help the general plan DEIR to withstand legal challenges.

Vicky Reinke disagreed with the requests for "very precise" language. She asked that the general plan remain in "very general terms."

People also discussed the alternatives to the County's proposed plan that should be evaluated in the DEIR. A representative of Castle and Cooke, the developers of Saddle Creek and Copper Town Square, asked that their proposed developments for Copper Valley Ranch and Sawmill Lake be added into the County's plan.

Marti Crane asked that the Mintier Draft General Plan be evaluated as an alternative in the DEIR. That plan was developed by the County with extensive public participation from 2007 to 2012 at a cost of nearly \$1 million but has never been released to the public.

Botanist Liz Gregg indicated that CSERC supported the "DOF (California Department of Finance) alternative," which would reduce the population potential under the plan down from 117,045 to 55,441 people to coincide with the population growth estimate for 2035 provided by the DOF.

Retired planner Antonie Wurster asked the County to consider a "no growth Alternative, because that's what we may be looking at." She wondered if people will want to come to Calaveras County in the future given the high fire danger.

The final topic of the evening was a call for people to find common ground. Ms. Wurster asked people to collaborate and try to help each other. District 5 Supervisor Candidate Ben Stopper stressed the need to finish the General Plan and also asked the Planning Director to, "Address these comments so we can come to a united conclusion and the general plan can move forward." Also listening carefully from the gallery was District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi, who generously shared a box of his fresh picked pears with those in attendance.

The Calaveras Planning Coalition is conducting an ongoing public relations campaign which encourages people to comment on the DEIR and was pleased with the turnout on July 31. The Coalition seeks to balance the conservation of local agricultural, natural, and historic resources with the need to provide jobs, housing, safety, and services. Coalition accomplishments have been in four areas: the general plan update, community plan preparation, water plans, and technical assistance to threatened neighborhoods.

Planning Director Maurer politely reminded people that written comments on the DEIR must be received by the Planning Department before 4 pm on August 13. You can send your written comments by U.S. mail to Peter Maurer, Planning Director, Calaveras County Planning Department, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249 or by email to pmaurer@co.calaveras.ca.us. The DEIR can be reviewed at the main library or on the County website at <http://planning.calaverasgov.us/GP-Update/CEQA>. If you prefer, you can purchase a computer disc or hard copy of the DEIR at the Planning Department.

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