

D5 hopefuls talk about General Plan

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / May 23, 2018

Calaveras County's long-awaited General Plan update came under scrutiny at the District 5 Supervisors candidates' night on May 10.

The update has been in the works since 2006 and cost more than \$2 million.

Incumbent Clyde Clapp and challengers Bruce Giudici, Gregory Gustafson and Benjamin Stopper were asked what was their experience with land use planning, how would they insure the General Plan would be completed and how should the Board of Supervisors become more involved in the process.

"It is crucial we have a finished General Plan," said Stopper, a former planning commissioner during Steve Kearney's time as supervisor.

The General Plan provides a clear path for economic viability and outlines the proper places for industry, agriculture, commercial and residential development, he said.

The General Plan will also have a bearing on water rights moving forward, said Stopper, a water treatment operator for the Calaveras County Water District, as the burden of proof will be upon the county to show growth in order to retain existing water rights.

Clapp said the General Plan update is entering some of its final phases and at this point is out of the hands of the Board of Supervisors.

The draft Environmental Impact Report for the General Plan is undergoing administrative action in the county Planning Department and about to go out for public review.

Once the review is completed it will go back to the Planning Department to answer questions posed by the public before going to the Planning Commission and eventually the Board of Supervisors for adoption.

Although it is vital to update the General Plan, Giudici said the current draft is "a flawed document" because it wasn't properly developed.

He was critical of the board removing community plans to speed up the process and said a previous General Plan draft developed by Mintier and associates, the county's previous General Plan consultants, should be released to the public because it contains important background information necessary to develop a proper General Plan.

The public had invested a lot of money into the General Plan update, said Gustafson, who served on the Planning Commission during Darren Spellman's term as supervisor.

"We need to make sure we're doing the right thing" when it comes to land use decisions, he said.

The discussion then turned to growth, especially in District 5, which includes Jenny Lind and Rancho Calaveras.

Clapp said he was against any commercial development in Rancho.

Giudici cautioned against the county seeing growth as bad. The county will fade away if it purely wants to be a retirement area and the commercial cannabis industry offers the opportunity for more jobs, and more services.

While Rancho has its restrictions, Jenny Lind is not a part of the subdivision and he would like to see businesses there such as a coffee shop and the river area developed into a park.

"There's money to be made here by everyone," Gustafson said.

He said if the county is not encouraging growth, "we're going the other way."

He would like to see more businesses open in the area and suggested the idea of a co-op store.

"We need diverse economic growth." Stopper said.

The county relied primarily on the building industry and when the recession hit, tourism "didn't carry us through," he said.

Commercial cannabis would help, but can't carry the entire load, Stopper said. Attracting multiple industries would lighten that burden.

"Our biggest industry is retirees," Clapp said. "That's the machine that drives Rancho."

He argued against allowing commercial cannabis production back into the county and forcing retirees out.

Giudici and Stopper said retirees were really a minority in the community, that most of the population is made up of working people.

"I moved to a mixed residential community, Giudici said.

If the area were to go entirely retirement there would be no need for schools, he added.