

Planning Commission asks Supervisors to approve the General Plan - Still eliminating community plans for Valley Springs, Arnold, and Murphys.

On Thursday June 27, the Calaveras County Planning Commission recommended that the Board of Supervisors adopt the General Plan Update. The County originally expected to update the plan in just three years. If the Board of Supervisors approves a plan, the 12-year general plan update process will be complete

During seven prior meetings over four weeks, the Commissioners struggled to agree on many meaningful edits to the document. Commissioner Laddish came prepared to each meeting with lists of suggested changes for each element. Commission Chair Plotnik frequently agreed with these changes, while Commissioner Wooster frequently disagreed. Commissioner Henderson sometimes sided with Commissioner Laddish, and other times sided with Commissioner Wooster.

Only four of the five Commissioners participated in the first six meetings. The seat for the Commissioner from District One, representing San Andreas and Valley Springs, was empty until Trent Fiorino was approved to fill the vacant position by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday June 11.

While the map of the 2016 Draft General Plan Update was not changed much, the text was meaningfully edited.

In 2015 and 2016, the prior Board of Supervisors directed the Planning Department to eliminate the existing plans for Valley Springs, Arnold, Murphys and Avery/Hathaway Pines. None of the Supervisors who voted for those directions are currently on the Board of Supervisors. While some current Planning Commissioners expressed their frustration with so many community plans being eliminated from the Community Planning Element, they refused to go against those earlier Board directions. The Commission also refused to include the draft plans for Valley Springs (2017) and Copperopolis (2013).

The 2017 Valley Springs draft plan is a blend of the two plans prepared for Valley Springs in 2010. The blend was then edited to fit into the Community Planning Element. Despite the recommendation of Planning Director Maurer in 2017 to adopt the plan, the Planning

Commission has not acted on it since the plan was pulled from their agenda at the request of Supervisor Tofanelli.

While the Community Planning Element allows for additional community plans to be adopted in the future, no deadline was set for including any additional community plans.

In the General Plan Introduction, the purpose of the general plan was expanded to include the protection of public health, public safety, and the environment. A guiding principle was also amended to note that the County will follow all state and federal laws for environmental protection.

In the Land Use Element, a policy was added listing issues the County will consider when evaluating proposals to amend the general plan map to intensify development outside of Community Plan Areas. A policy was added, and an implementation measure restored, to encourage public participation in implementing community character and design policies. The future home occupation ordinance will minimize the impacts of home occupations on neighbors. Also, the two Copperopolis developments designated as Future Specific Plans, one at Sawmill Lake and the other at Table Mountain, will be expected to provide open space, public recreation, and a range of housing types.

In the Conservation and Open Space Element, the greenhouse gas reduction plan to fight global climate change was given a 2021 deadline for completion, a reduction target, and a menu of implementation measures to consider.

Commissioner Wooster promoted many changes to the Resource Production Element and the Conservation and Open Space Element. Specific streamside setbacks for developments were removed in favor of those recommended by the biologist evaluating the project. Pending development of a County mitigation plan of its own, the detailed and comprehensive Oak Woodland Implementation Policy in the draft plan was deleted in favor of a measure that defers to the minimum required state mitigation. Farmland conversion mitigation will be delayed pending the receipt of Department of Conservation mapping data, and there are no specified mitigation measures or ratios. Despite the fact that the Agricultural Coalition provided mitigation guidelines to the County in 2011, mitigation for the conversion of Resource Production land has been deferred until the development of new guidelines, and there is no

specified mitigation for use in the interim. In addition, a number of general plan policies and implementation measures were limited in their application to discretionary projects subject to CEQA review. Therefore, it is unlikely that future ministerial approvals and by-right projects will be conditioned to assist the County in reducing impacts on oak woodlands, biological resources, riparian corridors, air pollution, and odors.

Priorities for implementing the general plan are still a mystery, and are likely to remain so. The plan calls for the Board of Supervisors to annually select implementation priorities for the coming year based upon the recommendations of the Planning Director. This is critical, as many of the implementation measures in the General Plan Update are simply a promise to do more planning and program development at an unspecified time in the future. The biggest of these efforts will be reviewing and updating the County's ordinances to deal with issues like light and glare, landscaping, zoning for historic centers, expanding agritourism, noise, conforming to state fire safety regulations, grading, and when connection to public sewers is mandatory.

While not necessarily associated with ordinance changes, there are a number of other implementation measures that also have no priority or deadline.

With regard to public finances, the County will update Road Impact Mitigation fees and benefit basin fees. The County will help establish public facility impact fees, and complete capital facility plans. The County will adopt a Recreation Master Plan and pursue park funding.

With regard to public safety, the County will establish minimum level of service standards for emergency responders, law enforcement, water, sewer, fire protection, and other public facilities and services. The County will establish a comprehensive fire safety standards reference, a fire safety committee, evacuation plans for intermittent high occupancy uses like campgrounds, and a map of identified evacuation routes throughout the county.

However, when asked to identify the costs and personnel requirements for each of these tasks after plan adoption, Planning Director Maurer indicated he was not sure that he could do it. Instead, staff and funding requirements will be identified annually for the implementation tasks selected by the Board of Supervisors.

While the hearing was mostly a discussion among the Planning Commissioners and Planning Director Maurer, the meetings were sparsely attended by members of the public. Patricia Gordo

of Valley Springs spoke on many topics, generally asking the Commission to avoid unnecessary government intrusion into people's use of their property. Tom Hicks of Copper Valley LLC convinced the Commission to add four parcels to the Future Specific Plan designation for the Sawmill Lake development, but did not convince the Commission to change the proposed land use designation for the former Copper Valley project area.

Although the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC) submitted extensive written comments, and had many people speak on each day of the hearing, the Commission refused most of the general plan improvements offered by the CPC. Furthermore, the Commission refused to address CPC concerns regarding the inadequacy of the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR). Despite approximately 30 minutes of public testimony asking for the Commission to take 21 specific actions to correct the County's responses to comments on the DEIR, the Commission was silent on the subject. Despite a CPC memo and testimony explaining flaws in the FEIR impact analyses, flaws in the mitigation measures, and flaws in the alternatives analysis, the Commission was silent on those subjects as well.

The latest version of the General Plan Update can be downloaded from the County's website at <https://planning.calaverasgov.us/GP-Update>. You can direct your concerns regarding the plan to the Board of Supervisors at 'BoardClerk@co.calaveras.ca.us'. The Board of Supervisors may consider the General Plan Update as soon as July 30.

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