

Supervisors pass Valley Springs community plan

By Davis Harper

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It took more than a decade of controversial planning efforts for a new Valley Springs community plan to make it before the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors Tuesday. With little discussion, the board approved it unanimously.

While the county's General Plan is the framework that governs development for the whole county, the Community Planning element in the General Plan allows for individual communities to set specific policies within that larger framework to address the long-term vision for an area. Supervisors adopted a General Plan update in November of 2019 that excluded community plans for the areas of Valley Springs and Copperopolis.

Updating a community plan written in 1974 for Valley Springs has been a controversial undertaking since 2008, when the Calaveras Council of Governments (CCOG) received a Caltrans grant to develop a new plan with considerable community involvement.

The inclusion of Rancho Calaveras in that plan was a major item of contention, and the area has since been removed from the plan boundaries.

In response, District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli and a small ad hoc committee of residents he appointed that did not agree with the "content and direction" of the CCOG plan formed their own alternative plan.

Before supervisors Tuesday was a blend of those two plans, amended and approved by the Planning Commission in August.

The vision is to preserve Valley Springs' "small-town rural atmosphere, framed by open space vistas, agricultural lands, mature oak trees and woodlands, rolling hills with tree-covered ridgelines, Castle Rock, Valley Springs Peak" and other features.

"Wildlife will continue to inhabit the surrounding areas and coexist with local residents in peaceful, quiet neighborhoods," the plan reads. "Valley Springs' historic core will evolve into a prosperous, walkable mixed-use district, preserving and building upon its original 18-block grid and cultural heritage as a farming, ranching and late-1800s railroad town. The Town Center ... will serve as a focal point for parks and recreation, tourism, commerce, public institutions and public space for community interaction, while remaining a safe, attractive rural community."

Large-scale industrial and retail buildings are generally unwelcome, and new residential development will protect open space and buffer lands, as well as historic and natural site features and resources, per the plan.

Transportation planning will be "safe and effective" for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists and will "honor Valley Springs' natural surroundings, agricultural and ranching heritage, creeks and floodplains, and respond to surrounding community needs, from rural edges to residential neighborhoods to the Town Center."

Supervisors, working with Planning Director Peter Maurer, made minor adjustments to the plan Tuesday before approval.

"This is really well-drafted and I want to thank the planning commission and you for all the work you've done, along with all the stakeholders over the years ..." said Ben Stopper, supervisor for district 5, which is partially included in the plan boundaries.

Stopper's minor stipulation was to include the word, "encourage" in a policy about limiting development on steep hillsides and hilltops.

Tofanelli made the motion, and Stopper made the second to approve the plan.

“Thank you so much for all the hard work over the many years putting this together ... I’m sure it’s one thing that you’d like to close the book on,” Tofanelli said to Maurer.

The Calaveras Planning Coalition, a community planning group, sued the county over its General Plan update in December of 2019, citing a lack of clear deadlines for implementation of approximately 120 mitigation measures listed in the plan, including the excluded community plans.

“I’m glad to see the county moving forward with this,” said coalition member Joyce Techel of the Valley Springs Community Plan. “As development takes place, some things will be addressed that wouldn’t have been addressed if the plan wasn’t there. Is it perfect? No, but not much is.”

http://www.calaverasenterprise.com/news/article_97c758e8-fde3-11ea-856e-5ff5d510f51c.html