

Supervisors adopt comprehensive zoning ordinance update

Press Release / The Valley Springs News / Friday, July 19, 2024

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday adopted the first comprehensive update of the county's zoning ordinance since 1986.

The 270-page zoning ordinance identifies which land uses can occur in which zones without a county permit, which land uses require a county permit, and which standards apply to each land use.

In addition, more than 2,000 parcels were rezoned to comparable new zoning categories primarily because some unnecessary zoning categories were eliminated. Although each affected property owner was given three notices of the pending rezone, very few expressed concerns.

Most of the Zoning Ordinance Update retains existing code provisions but in a more organized format with clarifying explanations and illustrations. As Gina Kathan from the Planning Department stated, "Everything has a category. Everything is defined." Some new provisions have been added to implement more than 25 measures in the 2019 General Plan Update so residents can benefit from modern policies drafted to improve the quality of life.

Tom Infusino of the Calaveras Planning Coalition encouraged the county to, "Keep up the good work" as it completes other planning tasks this year including the community plan for Copperopolis and the greenhouse gas reduction plan. He reminded the board that next year there is a "State mandated update of the open space element," and that "It is the Highway 4 corridor's turn to get community plans and/or design review guidelines."

Marti Crane from Valley Springs echoed the concern indicating that it is, "Especially critical to address open space issues. The wildfire and conservation conditions on the landscape are degrading as we speak." She added that, "This is not the time for delay. This is a time screaming out for prompt action."

Interim Planning Director Peter Maurer encouraged the board to schedule a study session in a month or so to prioritize additional planning tasks and to provide detailed direction on policy choices related to those tasks.

The Board of Supervisors expressed its appreciation for the work that went into the ordinance update. Supervisor Huberty gave special thanks to the Planning Commission and its chair, Michelle Plotnik. Supervisor Tofanelli said, "I want to thank all the staff." Supervisor Garamendi acknowledged, "This is a monumental effort. I want to thank all of you."

The code supports a broad spectrum of local economic opportunities. In addition to the typical commercial and industrial uses, zoning provisions outline opportunities for home occupations and for rural home industries. The zoning ordinance also outlines where residential uses can be intermixed with commercial use and establishes the ratio of commercial to residential use.

Allowing for residential uses in commercial zones could provide economic benefit for small businesses, as well as opportunities for affordable housing.

"Thank you for including the section on mixed uses," said Linda Diesem during the time allotted for public comments.

While promoting economic development, the code also respects the rural quality of life in Calaveras County. Requiring a permit for telecommunication facilities in certain zones should

help prevent the proliferation of monopine cell towers, allow for public input, and ensure facilities are more beneficial than burdensome for the community.

Colleen Platt of MyValleySprings.com supportively wrote, “These revised standards and updated permit requirements for telecommunications facilities will help reduce new cell tower impacts, controversies, and conflicts in residential areas.”

A new illumination ordinance sets clear standards for the types of new exterior lighting that may be installed. By setting maximum light levels at property lines, it provides a measurable and enforceable requirement.

Updates to various sections of the code better protect the community from the risk of wildfire, one of the biggest threats to Calaveras County. The update requires permits for certain uses in certain zones, which can help prevent human-caused ignitions in remote locations with long emergency response times, and without adequate evacuation routes.

Additionally, the update includes development setbacks from streamsides, wetlands, and agricultural lands. These development setbacks attempt to protect those resources while balancing aesthetic, natural resource, and property interests.

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