

# Copperopolis community plan proposal receives support from Planning Commission

[lance@calaverasenterprise.com](mailto:lance@calaverasenterprise.com)

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[By Lance Armstrong](#)

The Calaveras County Planning Commission, on Jan. 23, voted 3-1 to support a proposed amendment to the county's general plan to add a section in the community planning element for Copperopolis.

Commissioner Michael Robie cast the lone vote in opposition of this proposal, and Commissioner Don Parker was absent from the meeting.

Five years ago, when the county Board of Supervisors adopted the general plan, the community planning element did not include Valley Springs and Copperopolis, as their descriptions and policies were not yet completed. Both communities had expressed interest in wanting to be included in the element.

While Valley Springs was added to the element in 2020, the process to add Copperopolis has taken significantly longer. A county staff report notes: "After many years of county staff and citizen efforts, policies for Copperopolis are ready to be added."

The Copperopolis community plan area is described in that report as being located north of and adjacent to Lake Tulloch, with O'Byrnes Ferry Road and Highway 4 serving as the primary transportation routes.

The planning area is 12 miles south of Angels Camp, along Highway 4, separated by Bear Mountain, Copperopolis Mountain, Lightner Peak, and many ridges with elevations ranging from 1,100 feet to 1,800 feet.

It is mentioned in the report that the development of plan policies for Copperopolis include "countless meetings and workshops" that extend back to the 1990s. During that process, citizens proposed policies to the county's staff.

The proposed community plan for Copperopolis refers to the residents' desire for the town to include a multipurpose community center with sports facilities, a playground, a dog park, a cooling shelter, senior citizen activities, and a swimming facility.

The stated community vision in the proposed community plan notes: "Copperopolis will retain its small town, rural community identity, preserve its natural beauty, and protect its vast recreational opportunities while embracing diverse housing, commercial, recreational and employment opportunities integrated with the natural resources and open-space elements of the community. Lake Tulloch will flourish as a safe and uncongested community attraction."

In his presentation to the commission, Peter Maurer, the county's special projects administrator, stated that the proposed Copperopolis community plan represents the desires of that community and how its residents would like to have this community developed.

"I think we're at a point where we're all pretty much in agreement that this is what (the) community of Copperopolis would like to see, how future development is to occur," he said.

Maurer described Copperopolis as a unique town, which is kind of three communities that are linked together.

"In my opinion, Copperopolis is really sort of three different communities together," he said. "You've got the old historic community, you've got the Lake Tulloch area, residential development, you've got the new commercial development at town square, and you've got the newer subdivisions off of Little John Road.

"And I think the real challenge with this plan is, how do you tie all of that together? And that is what I think that the community itself has been struggling with for decades now."

The staff report recognizes that while Copperopolis includes a historic section, the newer town center has shifted some of the commercial activity away from the historic part of the town.

Also identified in the report is significant growth around Lake Tulloch and further to the southwest.

The vision, goals and policies of the proposed community plan would try to provide more cohesion and interconnection between the physically separated areas of Copperopolis, the staff report notes.

Maurer mentioned that during the process of establishing the proposed Copperopolis community plan, it was discovered that there were policies referenced that were already a part of the general plan and would thus apply regardless of their inclusion in the community planning element.

He added that while the county's staff deleted many of those repetitions, some of the repetitions were kept to provide emphasis.

"There (remains) a little bit of repetition (in the proposed community plan)," Maurer said. "I think that part of that is just simply, this is something that is really important to this community, and that's why (those repetitions were kept). And we've done that a little bit with some of the other community planning documents, as well, where there's a little bit of repetition."

During the commission's Jan. 23 meeting, a significant amount of time was dedicated to the discussion of minor edits and corrections, as well as policy language.

Among this agenda item's public speakers was Copperopolis resident Dena McAfee, who identified herself as one of the many residents of that town who worked on previous versions of the Copperopolis community plan.

She spoke about the uniqueness of Copperopolis.

“It’s seven or eight or 13 communities all within a general vicinity, and permanent residents have often looked for a way to bring all of those subdivisions together and to create a true Copperopolis community,” she said.

While McAfee expressed appreciation for Maurer’s efforts to condense the proposed community plan document “from a lot of emotional input from the community into a planning document,” she mentioned that she feels that some of the community’s desires are lost in the condensed document.

“We went from a passionate plea for facilities and services to a cut-and-dry document that I felt like I had to dig between the lines to see that it referenced what we originally talked about,” she said.

McAfee stated that one of the most important points made by the community was that Copperopolis lacks a true public community gathering area.

Regarding Copperopolis’ town square, McAfee suggested that it not be given a name that is “owner-specific.”

“As we know, things change, and (if) this is intended as a living document, then we would probably want to refer to it as something as neutral as possible,” she said.

Another public speaker, Copperopolis resident Ralph Copeland, also referred to himself as one who worked on the community plan for years.

Copeland spoke about the issue of future development in Copperopolis.

“It’s very tough to say that we want to keep our rural atmosphere, and also that we want to keep our foot in development,” he said. “And we’re not here to control development. We’re here to make Copperopolis remain historical, rather than rural.

“We’re here to make Copperopolis the gateway to Calaveras County, to be partners with Valley Springs, who has a very detailed, very good community plan. So, we basically have the one portion of Calaveras County, sort of like the gatekeepers, if you may say, for Calaveras County. And we don’t want to see this overdeveloped.”

Copeland additionally stressed the need for affordable housing.

“When I say affordable, I’m not talking about the homeless encampments,” he said. “I’m talking about your firefighters, your doctors, your nurses finding affordable homes, young families, people who want to stay, go away to school and come back and want to stay and grow their families, want to have their affordable house rather than get an inheritance from the grandparents or something.”

Another topic that Copeland addressed was the idea of connecting Copperopolis with the New Melones Reservoir.

“Regarding this road to New Melones, the first time I ever heard of it after 25 years of living in Copperopolis was at one of these (community planning) meetings,” he said. “The circle of friends and

associates and so forth I have in Copperopolis have made no mention of a need or want of a road to New Melones. And it's my understanding that the (U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management) has specific language that will make it extremely difficult.

"So, having this type of item, this detailed item, in our fish net of a community plan, I think could be handled by our board, our supervisor, or maybe a group of citizens (that could) come together and develop outside the community plan this particular road and present it to the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, the building department, whoever."

Janet Sterling, a 25-year Copperopolis resident, stated that she understands that the community will not get everything it wants.

"I feel like when the parties walk away, you feel pretty good about it on both sides that we've done a pretty decent job," she said. "So, I am glad that it's here finally, because, as it's been previously stated, it's been a long time coming."

Thomas Hix, of CV Development, also expressed support for the proposed community plan.

"We think (the plan has) done a good job of narrowing it down to what it should be: a good vision document for future development in Copperopolis," he said. "So, we're here to support it."

Following the public comment period of this agenda item, Chair Michelle Plotnik provided an explanation of how the community plan would be used.

"It's not requiring that the county go out and find funding or do any of these things on behalf of that community," she said. "It's more a standard to keep in mind and to check against when you're reviewing a proposed project or prioritizing projects for a community where money is available."

Commissioner Timothy Laddish acknowledged the Copperopolis residents who dedicated years to working on their proposed community plan.

"I just think the Planning Commission should express appreciation to all the members of the community who have been working on this for so long, and I hope not too many are frustrated with how it has turned out," he said.

With the commission's support of the proposed general plan amendment to add a description and policies for the Copperopolis community to the community planning element, this item will next be heard by the Board of Supervisors.

Maurer told the commissioners that the proposed amendment would be presented to the supervisors for their consideration "hopefully in about a month."

"This will be scheduled for the Board of Supervisors as soon as I can get the board packet put together," he said.

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