

Calls for county to finalize open space plan

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Calaveras County officials were called upon to make improvements to the open space portion of the county's General Plan at last week's meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

Six speakers from the Calaveras Planning Coalition addressed the board on the matter during the public comment portion of the Jan. 13 meeting. The outcry, according to the coalition, was prompted by the county's failure to meet the state's Jan. 1, 2026, deadline for updating the plan. Another such deadline looms in 2028.

Muriel Zeller of the Calaveras Planning Coalition has repeatedly asked the county to complete the required updates in recent years. Despite past promises, the planning department repeatedly failed to produce the draft updates. In October of last year, the CPC went so far as to provide the county with draft updates to try to move the process forward. Planning Director Bret Sampson, according to the coalition, now hopes to bring the planning department's draft updates to the public and the Planning Commission for review in March.

Calaveras Planning Coalition member Linda Diesem began by urging the county to complete the overdue update to provide equitable access to open space for all residents and to address climate change.

Joyce Techel from Valley Springs explained that the incomplete open space plan disables the county from lawfully approving the land use proposals of private landowners.

"In Calaveras County, where the Open Space Plan does not conform to requirements of the open space statute, the county has no lawful authority to approve building permits or subdivisions on open space lands," she said.

Penny Sarvis from Murphys pointed out that the county's untimely work has placed local landowners in a bad position when they try to compete for state conservation funding.

"The foothill counties with which Calaveras landowners must compete for state open space funds including Plumas, Placer, El Dorado, Amador, Tuolumne and Mariposa complete their open space plans with some form of implementation timeline," she said. So far, Calaveras County has not done so. A county can show funders that it is serious about prompt open space conservation by keeping pace with an implementation timeline.

"Please add an implementation timeline to our local open space plan to help us compete for these funds," she asked.

Sue Holper encouraged the county "to take a landscape-level approach to conserve an integrated network of open space resources" over the next two years "to provide outdoor recreation, sustain fish and wildlife habitat; continue agricultural, timber and mineral production; and ensure public safety and protect cultural resources."

Marti Crane from Valley Springs encouraged the Planning Commission and local residents to, "work together to fix the open space plan over the next two years. It will be far easier and far more rewarding than you think."

Techel told the Board of Supervisors why the open space plan changes were so important to local residents and visitors.

"This is about people being safe in the face of worsening wildfires, making sure that ranchers have enough water for their livestock in the face of drier years, securing available funding from the State of California so willing local landowners can reduce wildfire risks, supplement water supplies, improve rangeland productivity, conserve habitat, and sequester carbon," she said.

Tom Infusino noted that although today's ranchers face many threats the supervisors cannot address, "You can fix the open space plan as suggested by the CPC speakers today."