

The Birth of an Activist

Colleen Platt loves Calaveras County. She lives in Valley Springs, retired as a landscape architect several years ago, and looked forward to enjoying the peace and quiet of her part of the county. Now she's working to preserve this dream.

"Things happen around us and we don't pay as much attention as we should, not until it hits you in the face. Things happened little by little, but then there was a development right by the highway that definitely was not rural. That made me start paying more attention. Sometimes the first time people know a project is going in is when they see the stakes in the ground and the bulldozers."

Colleen started clipping articles in the paper and saw one describing a proposal to build a 1000-unit development, called Spring Valley.

"I attended a Town Hall meeting about it initiated by the developers. I expected that County officials would be there, but nobody was there from the government." Then she realized the developers weren't planning to take care of some critical traffic issues. "Nobody asked us if we wanted the project—it was presented as a done deal. I didn't know any thing about community planning, but a few of us got together and started talking about the issues." The newly formed citizens group began to educate themselves about development and planning in Calaveras County.

The group set up a web site, <http://www.myvalleysprings.com/> to inform people and get the public involved. They concentrated on Valley Springs, but soon realized many of the issues were broader. "As it morphed into bigger and bigger issues, we realized many of the problems were countywide."

As the group got into the details of development, they found that "the county doesn't have a zoning map for the public; you have to ask parcel by parcel. There is no map of current developments. These are huge obstacles." So they decided to try to fix the problem. They developed their own map of planned developments in their area and continue to research and update it. (see <http://www.myvalleysprings.com/development.html>)

Colleen and members of her group have been attending the recent Board of Supervisors meetings, making public comments, and are following the progress of a county general plan with great interest. Asked what they want to focus on, she replied, "The General Plan is right up there and the local Valley Springs Community Plan is also a major focus."

She is not against growth, but wants to preserve the area's rural beauty and serenity. "Traffic and roads are already a problem and will get worse if development proceeds unchecked," she said. "And that goes against the grain of living in the foothills."