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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CALAVERAS COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
REGARDING COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATES 8-21-07

My name is Tom Infusino. I am the facilitator for the Calaveras Planning Coalition.

The Calaveras Planning Coalition (“Coalition”) is composed of community groups, organizations, and individuals interested in growth and planning issues in Calaveras County. The Coalition is united in its belief in the need for a comprehensive update to the Calaveras County General Plan. Further, the Coalition believes that citizen participation is the key to a successful update of the General Plan, and necessary to the update of community plans throughout the County.

Over the past 20 months of traveling from community to community to discuss the general plan update, it has been my great privilege to get to know some of the good people of Calaveras County. I have found the good people of Calaveras to be a diverse lot. They vary in religion, in politics, in age, in tastes, and in voice. Some work hard in the forest or on the range, while others are retired. Some are busy meeting the needs of the many tourists who visit this beautiful area, while others serve the needs of those who call Calaveras their home all year round. Some live here in Calaveras but have to work elsewhere, while others work here in Calaveras and have to live elsewhere.

However, despite their many differences, I have found that these good people are united in at least one thing: their intense love for this land you call Calaveras. From the wide open ranges to the mini-ranchettes, from the sprawling oak woodlands to the quaint downtowns, from the vast conifer forest to the family orchard, from the deep river canyons to the proudly owned family homes, the good people of Calaveras County deeply and profoundly love the landscape they call home.

I have found that most of these people are here, and hope to stay here, because of their heartfelt connection to their close family and dear friends, because of their deep and abiding connection to this glorious landscape, and because of their strong faith that the people of this County will protect the diversity of its rural legacy.

The Coalition believes that the County can best protect this diverse rural legacy by upgrading the community plans. I am here today to provide you with 3 compelling reasons to upgrade the Community Plans during your comprehensive general plan update.

Reason Number 1: Community Plans provide the best model for reflecting the community diversity.

A review of existing Community Plans and the General Plan shows that some communities want historic district design guidelines, while other communities do not. Some communities are concerned about development on steep slopes, while others are not. Some communities are concerned about localized flood hazards, while other communities are not prone to flooding. Some communities are concerned about regulating excess development, while others are seeking to encourage new development.

Put one way, Community Plans provide for creative planning solutions to localized problems. They provide local people the opportunities to meet local planning goals in locally desirable ways.

Put another way, Community Plans provide opportunities for Communities to maintain their values, without imposing them on the rest of the County. They provide a convenient place for skilled politicians to safely store strongly held and but merely local viewpoints. For example, if star gazers in Arnold want outdoor lighting standards to reduce light pollution, their community plan can do that, without imposing similar constraints in Valley Springs, whose night sky is already washed out by the lights of San Joaquin County. In this way, community plans can help both to respect community diversity, and to reduce conflict over which policies end up applying uniformly, to the entire County, in the General Plan.

Reason Number 2: The Upgrade of the Community Plans is very popular.

It has been much easier for the Coalition to organize folks to discuss the upgrade of their community plans (that affect them the most), than it has been to get folks interested in the County-wide general plan (which is kind of hard to get your head around). People in places like Copperopolis and District 2, who are without community plans, want community plans for their area, and they continue to work hard to develop and refine these plans on their own. People in places like Valley Springs want their Community Plan updated to reflect current and future conditions, and they are raising funds and holding workshops to update their plan on their own. People in places like San Andreas want the good Goals and Policies in their Community Plan implemented, and they are drafting implementation measures on their own. People with community plans of more recent vintage just want to hold on to what they have, by ensuring that their plans meet the standards of modern planning law. My dear supervisors, the Community Plan Upgrade train has left the station and has a full head of steam. I implore you; do not stand in its way! The smart move is to meet the train at the next station, and incorporate these upgraded general plans into your Comprehensive General Plan Update.

Reason Number 3: You have to plan for the development of these communities anyway to properly update the General Plan.

To conform to state law, the General Plan must include a map showing the land use designation for every acre in the County, including the acres covered by the existing Community Plans. Those land use designations must be defined in the General Plan. There is no way to avoid planning for these communities. The real question is do you want to build on the existing community plans, or do you want to start from scratch with some other planning model? You are already collecting community input. Why not put it to good use, by upgrading the community plans?

In conclusion I would like to remind you that, when I came before this board in January of 2006, 20 months ago, I gave you three pieces of advice on how to proceed with your General Plan Update. I encourage you to “Improve Upon What Others Have Done,” to “Leave No One Behind,” and to “Seize the Day.” By upgrading the existing community plans you will improve upon what others have done. By adding the new community plans, you will leave no one behind.

But how do you seize the day? What is the prize to be won by your vote today to upgrade the community plans during the General Plan Update?

Your vote will inspire communities throughout Calaveras County to continue to cooperate in the rest of the General Plan Update process.

Your vote will respect the wishes of highly motivated communities to chart their vision for a brighter future.

Your vote will energize community members to continue their volunteer efforts to upgrade their community plans.

So today, the Coalition stands with people from Arnold, who want to retain the integrity of their existing community plan, and we ask you, the Board, to stand with them.

Today, the Coalition stands with the people in Murphys, San Andreas, and Valley Springs who are working to upgrade their community plans, and we ask you, the Board, to stand with them.

The Coalition stands with the people in Copperopolis and in District 2, who long for the adoption of their first community plans, and we ask you, the Board, to stand with them.

Please, take this opportunity to stand with us all.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the good people of Calaveras County.