

Calaveras needs economic vision

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Guest Opinion

By Steve Elias

As this column is being written, our county is entering the visioning phase of its general plan revision. Every 10 years counties have to re-vision their plans for future development. Notice the importance of the word "vision" in this process. The state Legislature thinks revisioning is so important that it created legislation requiring counties to revise their vision on a regular basis. So what is our vision to date? Based on community input so far, people care about the same things they cared about 10 years ago during the last revisioning. We care about improving infrastructure: roads, sewers, water delivery. We care about improving services: police, fire, childcare, and education. We care about preserving our rural quality of life: open space lands and historical resources. There are not incompatible goals. But based on 15 years of dealing with general plan issues in Calaveras, I believe we will continue to be as unsuccessful as we have been for the past 10 years when it comes to meeting those goals unless we spell out the economic consequences in our general plan. We need an economic element as part of the plan. As some people reading this

may already know, the state requires that certain topics, or elements, be included in all general plans. Safety, land use and housing are some of the required elements. We also have the option of addressing other topics. I think we need to address economics directly in our plan for the following reasons:

— An economic element would spell out the costs in dollars and cents of allowing our infrastructure needs to continue to slide – think sewage treatment, water quality.

— An economic element would spell out the costs of allowing vital services to deteriorate – think wildfires, crime.

— An economic element would spell out the costs of suburban sprawl and loss of tourism in a county that has many thousands of buildable parcels but continues to subdivide at an alarming rate under an illegal general plan.

As an advocate before the Board of Supervisors for preserving habitat areas, agricultural lands, and scenic/cultural resources, I have seen over the years how the vision we care about gets eaten up time and again by misguided and costly decisions based on faulty economics. That is why we need to spell out real costs in our plan and why we need to include an economic element.

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