

CALAVERAS' BLUEPRINT HITS ANOTHER ROADBLOCK

By ***Dana M. Nichols***

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Record Staff Writer

SAN ANDREAS - After seven years of work, Calaveras County still doesn't have an updated General Plan, and it now appears that it will take another year and a half.

Planning Department officials this week told the Board of Supervisors that trying to get it done by November 2014 is "aggressive," and that a variety of obstacles could delay the work further.

"I think I'm going to start to hyperventilate," Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Merita Callaway said.

The delay is worrisome to many leaders who hope to be ready with a plan that will ease the process of development if and when growth resumes.

As recently as January, planners had hoped to complete the task by the end of the year.

To do that, they were simultaneously working on the General Plan and environmental studies of the plan.

In April, the planning coalition sent county officials a letter warning that doing the documents simultaneously would limit public participation and that such a system makes it impossible for residents to offer input on the proposed plan that could then help shape the environmental studies.

The coalition includes a number of advocacy and conservation groups from throughout the county.

County Counsel Janis Elliott reviewed the matter and determined that doing the documents simultaneously "could create potential problems in terms of California Environmental Quality Act requirements," according to a staff report.

In other words, the finished plan would be fatally weakened and subject to lawsuits that could block developments.

Pretty much everyone involved, including the developers, environmental groups and county leaders, agrees they want the finished plan to stand up in court.

"I want to thank the Calaveras Planning Coalition for their letter and input," Callaway said during Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting.

Even though they want the plan completed as quickly as feasible, supervisors toyed with the idea of adding an element addressing water. That, said Planning Director Rebecca Willis, would delay the finish date further.

In the end, the board directed staff to work with water agencies to coordinate land use and management of water resources in ways other than adding a water element into the plan.

The board also decided to up the projected population increase for the plan to 30,000, significantly more than the 10,000 population increase by the year 2035 projected by the California Department of Finance.

The county has about 45,000 residents.

The board bumped the growth number up because developers in the Copperopolis area are poised to accommodate a much larger increase than other portions of the county.

Contact reporter Dana M. Nichols at (209) 607-1361 or dnichols@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/calaverasblog.

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