

Save the community plans

Posted: Tuesday, March 17, 2015 6:00 am

By Tom Infusino

Draft general plan comment deadline is Friday

When Calaveras County Planning Department staff members released the text of the draft general plan for public comment in December of last year, they disappointed many people by not including the community plans prepared by local citizens. To save your community plans, you need to again ask the planning director and the county supervisors to adopt community plans at the same time that they adopt the updated general plan.

The vision statements detailing the history, the current conditions and the future aspirations of each community do not appear in the draft general plan. The numerous policies that detail how the communities want to implement countywide plans in their areas do not appear in the draft general plan. The broad boundaries that circumscribe the communities where rural residents feel they belong do not appear in the draft general plan. All that remain are a few token policies from each community.

The absence of community plans in the draft general plan sharply contrasts with the current General Plan adopted in 1996, which is a generally applicable countywide plan containing more specific community plans for places like Murphys, San Andreas, Valley Springs and Mokelumne Hill.

The Planning Department announced that it eliminated the community plans in response to concerns from the current Board of Supervisors regarding the additional cost and delay of adopting such plans. That cost pales in comparison to the value of the community plans and the waste associated with eliminating them.

You can remind your county government of the great value and benefits of community plans. From 2006 through 2012, people from all corners of the county spent time and money working with their neighbors, their supervisors, Planning Department staff members and consultants to create or to update their community plans. Adopting the community plans will allow us all to reap the benefits of those expenditures. Eliminating the community plans now will waste that time and money.

The large numbers of citizens who participated in drafting their community plans expect the county to follow through on its promises and adopt those plans. Meeting that expectation will help to restore people's confidence in the reliability of local government. Eliminating the community plans now will only further undermine that confidence. Homeowners have worked

hard to protect the distinctive characteristics of their local communities that enrich their lives and give value to their homes. Adopting the community plans will respect their efforts.

Through the community plan process, local citizens engaged in local planning to find local solutions to local problems. The solutions differ because the circumstances of each community differ. Some communities seek to expand water and sewer infrastructure to accommodate new types of development, while others seek to live without new infrastructure or new types of development. Community plans match the appropriate fix with the appropriate place.

No one-size-fits-all countywide plan can effectively serve the diversity of needs represented by each community, nor can such a plan effectively embrace each community's opportunities. Through their community plans, individual communities have sought to maintain their own values without imposing local limitations on the rest of the county. Community plans provide for these win-win solutions. A one-size-fits-all solution in a countywide plan unnecessarily forces win-lose choices.

The background information in community plans helps private sector investors determine how best to fit their new businesses into an existing community. This promotes economic development. In addition, community plans provide the guidance needed so that future land uses are designed to be consistent with a stated community vision.

It will be more costly to do community plans and their environmental review individually in the future. After completing the rest of the countywide general plan, it will be hard to find the planning resources and focus to complete individual community plans in the future. That is why so many community plans became outdated over the years.

The community plans will help county government to implement the countywide general plan that focuses new development, new infrastructure and new services in and around existing community centers. Adopting the community plans with the general plan jumpstarts general plan implementation to revitalize our community centers. Community plans do not work against the countywide general plan, they breathe life into it. The community plans reflect the diversity, the hard work and the wisdom of the good people of Calaveras County.

To support the inclusion of community plans in the updated general plan, please send your comments to Planning Director Peter Maurer, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249. You can e-mail him at gpupdate@co.calaveras.ca.us. The supervisors' e-mail addresses are on the county website at calaverasgov.us. Your comments will be most effective if they are received by the March 20 deadline for written comments.

Tom Infusino is a land-use attorney and the facilitator of the Calaveras Planning Coalition, a group that supports community plans. For more information go to calaverascap.com.