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July 7, 2023

County of Calaveras
Planning Department
(Sent by email)

RE: Comments on the County's May 2023 Draft Copperopolis Community Plan

Dear Sir:

My name is Tom Infusino, and I am presenting these comments on behalf of the Calaveras Planning Coalition. The CPC is a group of community organizations and individuals who want a healthy and sustainable future for Calaveras County. We believe that public participation is critical to a successful planning process. United behind eleven land use and development principles, we seek to balance the conservation of local agricultural, natural and historic resources with the need to provide jobs, housing, safety, and services.

I. Background

Citizens in Copperopolis have been working to get a community plan since 1992, but the two prior draft plans were not adopted by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors. In 2019, the Board of Supervisors indicated that the top two priority community plans for adoption would be, first, the Valley Springs Community Plan and, second, the Copperopolis Community Plan. After 14 years of work, the Valley Springs Community Plan was adopted in 2020. In 2020, Supervisor Folendorf was elected to represent Copperopolis on the Board of Supervisors. Getting a community plan for Copperopolis was among her campaign promises. However, in 2021 and 2022, the Board of Supervisors refused to make the Copperopolis Community Plan a general plan implementation priority.

In response, a group of CPC participants from the Copperopolis area assembled a new draft plan based on the best parts of the prior two plans, with the addition of recent relevant issues. The

hallmarks of that draft plan were specific tasks to be completed in a timely fashion to meet reasonable standards to support the infrastructure and amenities needed for a safe, sustainable, and prosperous Copperopolis. That draft was sent to the Planning Department in September of 2022. In May of 2023, the Planning Department held a community plan workshop and released a very different draft plan for Copperopolis. Comments on that plan are due by July 7, 2023.

Our comments on the County's May 2023 Draft Copperopolis Community Plan are below.

II. General Comments.

As detailed below in Section III of these comments, the CPC very much appreciates the many positive aspirations for the Copperopolis community expressed in the vision, goals and policies in the County's draft community plan for Copperopolis. We hope that these positive aspirations remain in the plan and are adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

As detailed in Section IV of these comments, the CPC hopes that the County will link the positive aspirations in the community plan policies to actual implementation measures already approved by the Board of Supervisors in the 2019 General Plan Update. This was done with the Valley Springs Community Plan adopted in 2020. We believe that this linkage will help to make the positive policy aspirations become a reality.

As also detailed in Section IV, the CPC hopes that the County will replace some of the evasive verbs like "encourage" and "support" with verbs that commit the County to achieve the plan's positive aspirations like "ensure," "employ," "apply," "complete," "require," and "secure." Again, we believe that this commitment will help to make the aspirations become a reality.

III. There are many positive aspects of the County's May 2023 Draft Plan.

There are many positive aspects of the plan that we hope will remain and be adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

Length

In contrast to most of the other community plans, the County has displayed a willingness to have a community plan that is longer than a page or two. That is good. The plan includes many of the positive aspirations from the 2005 draft plan.

Things properly left out

The plan does not include the target population of 40,000 people from the 2005 plan. The plan does not include the land use map from the 2005 plan. These were major stumbling blocks for the 2005 plan. Thank you for removing them.

Location and Description

This section is more thorough than in many other existing community plans.

Community Vision

The vision includes many of the points covered in the CPC's draft plan, which borrowed heavily from the prior draft community plans. It mentions that visitors will experience a beautiful countryside and a friendly town. It mentions integrating housing, commercial and employment opportunities with natural resources and open space. It mentions revitalizing the historic downtown. It mentions safe and attractive access to the community via motorized and non-motorized transportation.

Economic Development Goals

Education, training, and jobs for youth and other residents are good things to have in a community.

Aesthetics/Community Character Goals

It would be nice to have orderly development that is well designed. It would be nice to have public facilities compatible with the community character.

Natural Resources Goals

It would be nice to preserve open space and agricultural lands and to have viable resource production operations.

Traffic/Circulation Goals

It would be nice to have a multimodal transportation system and safe speed limits.

Historic Preservation Goal

Good aspiration.

Public Safety Goals

Good aspirations.

Public/Community Services

Good aspirations.

Housing Goal

This goal is good.

Land Use and Housing Policies

It is good that new projects will be consistent with the general plan, provide a mix of uses, meet the housing needs of residents, and protect historic buildings.

It is good that there will be entryways, land for parks, land for schools, and maintained commercial districts.

Circulation and Public Facilities Policies

It is good that the aspiration is for traffic safety, for a multi-modal transportation system, for route connectivity, and for new development being responsible for necessary off-site improvements.

Housing Policies

It is good that the aspiration is for a diverse range of safe, energy efficient, and affordable housing.

Conservation and Open Space Policies

It is good that the aspirations are for an adequate water supply, conservation of scenic resources, recreational facilities, protected historical resources, mature trees, oak woodlands, water conservation, and agricultural lands.

Public Safety Policies

It is good that the aspiration is to protect people and property ~~from harm~~ from fires, from hazardous materials, and other man-made and natural hazards.

IV. We hope the County will fix the weaknesses in the May 2023 Draft Plan.

Location and Description of the Community

The boundaries described in the text are far more expansive than the community boundaries on the map, and as such they are confusing.

Community Vision

There is no mention of keeping a small-town atmosphere as in the CPC version. The term has been replaced with the less accurate general term “rural.” While a city with 40,000 people may still be considered rural by County officials, it is not what the people of Copperopolis are hoping for when they refer to a small town.

According to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, “Ideas and definitions relating to the term rural are diverse,” and, therefore, ambiguous. “For example, the Census Bureau defines rural as any population, housing, or territory not in an urban area.” To the Bureau this means an area in which the population does not exceed 50,000 residents.

There is no mention of the greenbelts and their location as in the CPC version.

There is no mention of preserving agricultural land and the cultural heritage of agriculture in the area as in the CPC version.

There is a typo. The phrase “gold course” should read “golf course”.

Community Goals

The community goals are separated from the community policies. It makes it hard to see if each goal is supported by a policy. This can lead to goals with no policy follow through. For example, there is a goal to consider a satellite sheriff station in Copperopolis, but there is no policy to say who will do the feasibility study nor when it will be done. For examples of how policies and implementation measures should follow goals, see the former Murphys/Douglas Flat Community Plan, Arnold Community Plan, and Avery/Hathaway Pines Community Plan on the County website. These plans functioned as part of the 1996 General Plan until November of 2019. Please add policies and implementation measures acceptable to County supervisors that will support the goals in the draft plan that are currently not accompanied by such provisions.

Economic Development Goals

The nature and the location of the economic development is too vague: “compliment the character of the appropriate areas of the community.” People don’t want big, noisy, smelly, ugly, traffic-snarling economic development next door to their homes. There is no clarity that the economic development is to be concentrated on or adjacent to parcels already designated for commercial or industrial development. It matters to people where the impact of intensive economic development occurs.

There is no mention of the reference buildings to be used for replicating historic design elements as in the CPC version. This is a place where a link to photographs of the historic designs would be particularly helpful to get the existing residents and new developers on the same page.

There is no mention of avoiding strip commercial development as in the CPC version and prior draft Copperopolis Community Plans.

There is no treatment of home businesses as in the CPC version. As noted above, people want the impact of the more intensive commercial development outside their residential areas but are more tolerant of truly low-impact home businesses.

Aesthetics/Community Character Goals

The word encourage is used instead of the word ensure when it comes to orderly and well-designed development with a rural atmosphere. Please guarantee orderly and well-designed development with a rural atmosphere by using a word like ensure or require instead of merely “encouraging” what the people want and what is, quite simply, the only thing that makes sense.

Traffic/Circulation Goals

Bulleted Goals 3 and 5 are actually policies and should be moved to the policy section.

The goal promotes infrastructure for economic growth, but does not qualify that in any way. The County should only promote infrastructure to support residential, commercial, and industrial growth in the community plan. Improving shared infrastructure is more likely to get community support. The County should not support extending infrastructure to serve speculative development of working lands or resources production land outside the plan area. Spending limited capital on infrastructure capital to serve new development outside the plan area is unlikely to get community support. Please consider modifying the goal accordingly.

Public Safety Goals

There is a goal to consider a satellite sheriff station in Copperopolis but there is no policy to say who will do the feasibility study and when it will be done. Please add a policy to outline the steps to follow through on this goal.

Housing Goal

While this is a good goal, the policy to actually address this goal was in the CPC's draft plan but was not included in the County's draft community plan. Please consider setting and implementing clear standards for affordable housing in new developments.

Community Plan Policies

Many policies in the County draft plan reflect the good aspirations of the goals but do not actually commit any County department to do anything specific by any specified time to actually achieve the good aspiration. In contrast, the CPC draft plan included specific procedures, specific timing, and specific standards to actually achieve the good aspirations of the community plan regarding land use, housing, circulation, conservation, public facilities, safety, and economic development. However, these provisions of the CPC draft plan were not included in the County draft plan.

Land Use and Housing Policies

The County uses the ambiguous word "Encourage" rather than the mandatory word "Ensure" with regard to the compatibility of new development with scenic and historic resources. Please consider using a mandatory word.

The policy aspirations in the plan are not linked to any specific implementation measures to achieve those aspirations. The Valley Springs Community Plan does make such a linkage between community plan policies and general plan implementation measures. This makes sense in places where a large amount of development is planned for and expected. The CPC's draft plan included a list of appropriate 2019 General Plan Implementation measures that would help to implement some of the Land Use and Housing Policies, especially those related to commercial development.

It is true that the policies related to the review of development proposals are easily implemented when proposed projects are reviewed by the Planning Department. Thus, policies could be implemented in this fashion without specifically being linked to

implementation measures. However, those policies calling for broader initiatives related to the existing community (e.g., schools, parks, community beautification, commercial district maintenance) will require more implementation effort. Please consider linking the policies with implementation measures.

The four land use policies in the CPC's draft plan with specific procedures and standards were not included in the County's draft plan. What is even sadder is that they have not been replaced by any better procedures or standards: they have been replaced by nothing. Please consider including specific procedures and standards you find acceptable to achieve the aspirations of these deleted land use policies.

Circulation and Public Facilities Policies

There are no clear objectives and implementation tasks identified. What is the annual accident rate you are hoping to get down to on O'Byrnes Ferry Road? What will be done to improve safety on O'Byrnes Ferry Road, by what agency, and by what date, and with what funds? Where will roadway connectivity be improved? What will be done to enhance emergency response, by what agency, by what date, and with what funds? Without more clarity there will be no activity and no accountability for the lack of activity.

The County omits the detailed and time specific policies suggested by the CPC to plan and fund the roads and trails needed to serve new development. If you persist in rejecting them, please replace them with something better and acceptable to the Board of Supervisors.

Housing Policies

It is not clear why this section is separate from the "Land Use & Housing" policies.

There are no clear objectives and implementation tasks identified.

Please link these policies to some Housing Element implementation measures. The Housing Element is good at identifying what will be done, by what agency, by what date, and with what funds.

The inclusionary housing measures in the CPC's draft plan are omitted from the County's plan. If you persist in rejecting them, please replace them with an inclusionary housing measure acceptable to you.

Conservation and Open Space Policies

Again, the word "Encourage" is used instead of the "Ensure" when it comes to important conservation issues such as the conservation of scenic resources, retaining mature trees in new development, preserving oak woodlands in accordance with the law, groundwater recharge, and stormwater capture. Please consider using mandatory language.

None of the six policies proposed by the CPC are included in the County's draft plan. These policies have specific procedures to follow and specific tasks to be timely

completed to actually achieve the plan's conservation and open space aspirations. If the County persists in rejecting them, please replace them with something better and acceptable to the supervisors.

Public Safety Policies

It is unfortunate that the word "Support" is used instead of a word such as "Follow," "Use," "Apply," or "Employ" that would convey a real commitment with regard to the potential use of "established standards" to protect people from unreasonable risks of harm. Please consider making a genuine commitment to protect people from unreasonable risks of harm.

V. Conclusion

Director Elliot, the Copperopolis Community Plan will be among the first major plans of your tenure as the Planning Director. It will go a long way to signaling your professionalism, balance, and equity in planning for the future of Calaveras County. We hope that you will transform the County's May 2023 draft plan into something that will serve well the residents of Copperopolis who have waited over 30 years for this plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas P. Infusino".

Thomas P. Infusino, Facilitator

Calaveras Planning Coalition