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General plan initiative gets close study

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - (Published October 19, 2003)

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors has requested a report on the impacts of an anticipated March initiative to adopt a blueprint for growth but opted not to place an opposing measure on the same ballot.

El Dorado Citizens for Responsible Planning submitted petitions bearing nearly 10,000 signatures to the Elections Department on Oct. 1 calling for the ballot measure to force quick adoption of a new general plan. The petitions have been certified by the Registrar of Voters and will be on the board's agenda Tuesday.

Under the state elections code, the Board of Supervisors may request a report on the initiative's legal impacts and its effects on housing, land use, traffic and other areas of concern. The report must be completed no later than 30 days after the initiative is certified.

"I think it's imperative that we do it," board Chairwoman Helen Baumann said.

Supervisor Charlie Paine had asked that the board also consider options for placing an advisory measure on the March 2004 ballot corresponding to the general plan initiative. But Paine withdrew his request Tuesday amid concerns that an opposing measure would further complicate the general plan debate.

El Dorado County has been without a general plan since 1999 when a Sacramento Superior Court judge ruled that the document adopted in 1996 failed to specify the impacts planned residential growth would have on traffic, water supplies and the quality of life in the foothills.

The county has been operating under a court writ of mandate while pursuing a new plan.

The initiative proposed by Citizens for Responsible Planning asks voters to approve a modified version of the 1996 plan, similar to one of four draft alternative plans that have been circulated by the county.

County staff members and consultants are preparing responses to public comments on the four draft alternatives and their accompanying environmental reports. Supervisors have said a final general plan, scheduled for adoption in June 2004, likely would be some combination of the alternatives.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney urged staff members to keep the report short. "The public needs to understand as clearly as possible where we're going with this." He said it is important that the analysis consider whether the general plan alternative on which the initiative is based is consistent with the policies set forth under Measure Y. The measure, approved by voters in 1998, requires developers to cover the costs of road improvements needed to serve traffic generated by their projects.

Baumann said she also wanted to know how the county would go about amending the general plan if the initiative were to pass.

Placerville resident Barry Wasserman said the report should examine the content of the proposed general plan and the impacts of the initiative. But he, too, argued for a straightforward analysis.

Don Hartley of El Dorado Hills said the initiative process is a way for citizens to ratify one of the general

plan alternatives.

He said the board could simplify the issue by declaring one of the four draft alternative plans as the board's preferred alternative.

"Any of the four plans would suffice," he said, arguing that the plan could be modified. "If you continue with the buffet approach, then you will have a new plan that requires a new EIR," Hartley said.

Art Marinaccio, representing the Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County, urged the board not to postpone placing the initiative on the ballot until it completes the analysis.

Green said the study was not intended as a delaying tactic and would be finished in time to place the measure on the March ballot.

About the Writer

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