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Board goes back to 1996 for a plan

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - (*Published May 9, 2004*)

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors changed horses last week as the general plan process entered the home stretch.

Instead of taking up the plan - based on environmental constraints - that emerged from hearings before the Planning Commission in March, the board voted 3-2 to pursue the 1996 plan alternative. Board Chairman Rusty Dupray and Supervisor Charlie Paine dissented.

"I'm personally disappointed that they didn't use the Planning Commission's base as our base," Dupray said of the majority's decision. "I thought they delivered a good product."

Some board members have argued that the 1996 plan has undergone the most public review, he noted. "My take on that is, 'Yeah, but it was thrown out in court,'" Dupray said.

The alternative is similar to the general plan adopted by the board in 1996. A Sacramento Superior Court judge ruled in 1999 that the environmental report for the plan failed to specify the effect residential growth would have on traffic, water and quality of life in the foothills.

Since then, the county has operated under a court writ of mandate. Development has been limited to projects approved under the 1999 order. The county has circulated four draft alternative general plans, including a modified version of the 1996 plan.

Supervisor Helen Baumann, who joined board members Jack Sweeney and David Solaro in opting for the 1996 alternative, stressed that it was chosen only as the base document. The board during hearings Monday and Wednesday incorporated many of the Planning Commission's recommendations, she said.

"It has been my assertion all along that we needed to adopt a base that gave us as much freedom as we could have to move forward with this in a creative way," Baumann said. She agreed to support the 1996 plan with certain conditions to deal with traffic and circulation issues.

They include requiring the county Department of Transportation to annually update road impact fees to ensure that development contributes enough money to pay for new roads and road improvements. Fees are to be updated within six months of the general plan's adoption, and developments approved during the interim must agree to pay the new fee, she said.

Former county Supervisor Bill Center said traffic has been his focus in evaluating the general plan alternatives. He was a proponent of Measure Y, a 1998 initiative approved by county voters to control traffic. Balancing growth with roadway capacity would go a long way toward resolving other plan issues, he said.

Although the board substituted traffic and circulation policies from the commission's proposal for those in the 1996 plan, he argued that the growth allowed under the 1996 plan would overwhelm the roadways.

Baumann said, however, that the total population projected under the 1996 plan exceeds that anticipated under the Planning Commission's recommended plan by only 511 people.

She also argued that the 1996 plan is the only alternative that would allow the county to meet the need for affordable housing.

Planning Commission members, who conducted six days of hearings in March, expressed disappointment and frustration with the board's selection of the 1996 alternative.

"I'm extremely disappointed," member John MacCready said. "I think some others may be more vehement about it than I am."

MacCready said it appeared to him that the board was trying to satisfy "special interests one way or another" in granting individuals' requests for land-use designations last week. As a winery owner, MacCready said he was pleased that the board incorporated the agricultural community's requests in the plan's agriculture and forestry element.

But MacCready said he feared the rest of the county would see fewer benefits from the 1996 version of the plan than the agricultural districts would.

Dupray said he supported the provisions sought by the agricultural community, although there is little agriculture in the El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park areas he represents. But in his efforts to reduce growth and traffic impacts on his district, Dupray said, "I didn't get reciprocation."

Supervisors stressed, however, that the general plan adoption hearings are continuing, and changes still may be made.

Dupray and Baumann said board members do not want to recirculate the environmental impact report for additional public comment.

If the general plan project manager and legal counsel determine that any of the changes the board has made would be significant enough to require recirculation, Dupray said he believed the board would opt to forgo them.

Hearings will resume Wednesday. Following reports by the general plan team, the board will deliberate on the adequacy of the environmental impact report and the plan itself. Sessions are scheduled from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. in the boardroom, 330 Fair Lane, Building A, Placerville.

About the Writer

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