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## Initiative puts plan fans on defensive

**Officials say El Dorado County's new blueprint for growth is adequate.**

**By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - *(Published August 8, 2004)***

An initiative that would impose constraints on El Dorado County's newly adopted general plan has been certified by the Elections Department, prompting groups backing the plan to form a coalition to defend the county's blueprint for growth.

"We want to make sure the voters know that we do have a general plan," said Debbie Manning, executive director of the El Dorado Hills Chamber of Commerce, which has joined the coalition endorsing the plan. "Maybe it's not the best plan, but we've got one. Yippee!"

Manning said the group opposes the "No Gridlock" initiative, which has qualified for the ballot, and a general plan referendum, currently the subject of a petition drive. The initiative would amend the county charter to tie future residential development to Highway 50 improvements.

An Elections Department spokeswoman said that based on a random sample of signatures, petitions submitted by the No Gridlock on Highway 50 Committee were certified with 7,172 valid signatures. Only 5,573 were required.

Backers of the initiative and the general plan referendum include county Supervisor Charlie Paine, the only board member to vote against the 2004 general plan July 19, Placerville Mayor Kathi Lishman and former county supervisors Bill Center and Sam Bradley.

Center has said he expects the measures to go before voters in a special election in January.

Meanwhile, plaintiffs in the lawsuit that derailed the county's 1996 general plan have until Aug. 18 to decide whether to file suit against the 2004 plan. Stephan Volker, attorney for El Dorado County Taxpayers for Quality Growth and other plaintiffs, said he does not believe the environmental document for the new plan has adequately addressed the defects the judge ordered the county to correct.

El Dorado County has operated under a court writ of mandate since 1999, when a Sacramento Superior Court judge ruled that the environmental report for the 1996 plan failed to specify the effect residential growth would have on traffic, water and quality of life in the foothills.

The new general plan will not become effective until the county returns to court and satisfies a judge that terms of the writ have been met.

Volker said his clients could file suit against the new general plan or wait and respond to the county when it returns to court.

Keith Johnson, a spokesman for El Dorado County Taxpayers for Quality Growth, said he is not part of the group promoting the general plan referendum, although he has signed the petition. "Referendums and initiatives are very iffy things," he said.

Some viewed March's overwhelming defeat of Measure G - which asked voters to adopt a revised version of the 1996 general plan - as a rejection of the plan that served as the base for the 2004 plan. But Johnson said he thinks many people opposed the measure because they objected to planning by initiative and believed the Board of Supervisors would settle on some version of the 1996 plan.

The El Dorado Hills Chamber of Commerce, in a break with other chambers in the county, opposed Measure G. But the board of directors supports the new general plan and opposes the No Gridlock initiative and the referendum petition drive, board Chairman Wayne Lowery said.

He said the chamber's position is that complex planning issues should be decided through the process of representative government, not at the ballot box. As for the anti-gridlock proposal, Lowery said, "We feel that would be cutting off our nose to spite our face."

The initiative aims to prevent traffic congestion by amending the county charter to prohibit approval of additional single-family residential lot splits or subdivisions of three or more parcels until Highway 50 is expanded to eight lanes between Cameron Park Drive and the Sacramento County line.

But Lowery said development impact fees provide the primary funding for new roadways, and the monies would not be available without development.

Manning said the coalition seeking to rally support for the general plan includes the El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park-Shingle Springs and El Dorado County chambers of commerce; El Dorado Builders Exchange; El Dorado Business Alliance; El Dorado County Association of Realtors; El Dorado County Taxpayers Association; and El Dorado County Taxpayers for Responsible Growth.

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#### About the Writer

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