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'Tweaked' traffic initiative going on El Dorado County ballot in November

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Marking what frequent foes hailed as a rare meeting of the minds, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors agreed to place a modified version of a decade-old traffic initiative before voters in November.

Measure Y, approved by nearly 61 percent of voters in 1998, required new development to pay the cost of road improvements to serve growth.

Its provisions have been incorporated in the general plan, the county's blueprint for growth. But critics and supporters say the measure's implementation has had unintended consequences.

Measure Y included a sunset clause, stipulating that it should go back to the voters this year. Last week, representatives of factions that backed and opposed the original measure urged the board to place the modified version on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Bill Center, a member of the Measure Y Committee, said the proposed modifications reflect the intent of the original measure.

"The goal was that we not overcommit to residential growth," he said.

The modified version specifies that Measure Y applies to traffic from single-family residential subdivision development projects of five parcels or more.

Center said Measure Y proponents recognize that the measure as implemented has stifled some types of growth that the county needs.

"We need to get out of the way of jobs and commercial (development)," he said.

Kirk Bone, a representative of Parker Development, said the proposed changes would make it easier for commercial development to occur by clarifying the requirements for "concurrency," the timing of growth-related road improvements.

"We are totally satisfied," Bone said.

He and Center praised Supervisors Ron Briggs and Jack Swee-ney for bringing representatives of various factions together to work out a compromise measure.

Jim Brunello, a land-use attorney, told the supervisors, "What's been put in front of you reflects 10 years of experience, and experience that we learned from. The result we reached here, I think, is about as good as you're going to get."

Placerville resident Clarence Dilts, however, said he was concerned that the board was acting without adequate public input.

Measure Y passed 10 years ago with 61 percent support, he said, "and now it's going to be on the ballot in tweaked form. Suppose the majority decides they don't like the tweaked form?"

Dilts suggested the board place both the original measure and the modified version on the ballot, and have the county counsel provide an explanation of the differences.

But Paul Raveling, speaking on behalf of the El Dorado Hills Citizens Alliance, said the group supported the modified version of the measure. He noted that it retains the requirement to fully fund road system improvements required for single-family residential development, but it permits use of additional funding sources, not just the traffic impact fees paid by new development.

The greatest dissension during the July 1 discussion was among the supervisors, who voted 3-2 to place the modified version, as presented, on the ballot.

Supervisors Helen Baumann and Rusty Dupray objected to requiring a four-fifths vote of the board to make additions to a list of roads allowed to operate with stop-and-go conditions. Though the original measure required voter approval for such additions, Baumann and Dupray said they favored allowing a three-fifths vote of the board.

Both said they were particularly concerned that requiring approval by a super-majority of the board would allow one member to block a project that might be critical to the county's economic development.

Supervisor Norma Santiago, however, argued that it would force developers and the board to work toward the best solutions.

Supervisor Sweeney said he would have preferred the three-fifths majority, but the four-fifths requirement was key to obtaining concessions from Measure Y proponents on the timing of improvements.

"Frankly," Sweeney said, "I'm amazed that people got together and got this much done, and I'm pleased."

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