

# Mountain Democrat

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## Supervisors re-authorize the ‘long, slow climb’ approach

By [Chris Daley](#)

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El Dorado County Supervisors posed their own version of the proverbial “chicken and egg” conundrum during Tuesday’s board meeting. In forecasting for growth, should housing projections come before traffic impact projections? And the answer is yes, no, we’re not sure. Housing projections must be at least partially based on existing or planned infrastructure, while infrastructure needs must be based on realistic housing projections.

Determining some reasonable solution to the dilemma was part of an update on the county’s “residential permit forecast” presentation by the Community Development Agency’s Long Range Planning Division. The CDA recommended and the board approved what has been termed the “long slow climb” approach to the 10-year forecast cycle. That method shows a cumulative growth rate of approximately 15 percent resulting in 3,329 housing permits being issued by fiscal year 2022-23.

Two other options were described, a “moderate growth” methodology which represented a slightly more aggressive basis for projections (4,865), and another based on “Approved Tentative Map Forecast (3,166).” The latter was not recommended as it contains an element that suggests after five years, “permit activity may decline.”

The permit forecast is an element required by the county’s general plan and is part of the foundation of the Capital Improvement Program. Also according to the general plan, the 10-year CIP must be updated every five years. Tuesday’s action on the annual “minor update” to the permit forecast “initiates the annual updating cycle for both the CIP and the TIM Fee Program,” an agenda document states. The TIM fee is the county’s Traffic Impact Mitigation fee charged to developers to pay for infrastructure improvements in advance of receiving a building permit. The bulk of the fees are paid by residential developers.

In accordance with the TIM policy, the county is obligated to reimburse each permittee a portion of the funds that were originally advanced at the end of a set term.

The bigger picture involves a 20-year growth forecast which, when completed, will generate the subsections of CIP and permit forecasts and will eventually drive both along with the TIM fee program. The interconnected programs and processes are all configured within the dictates of the general plan.

Development staff listed five factors which led them to recommend the more conservative “slow climb” approach. First is the “slow recovery of the housing market” followed by the “cost of homes” and a relatively sluggish pace for new construction. “Keeping cash on hand to repay current and future obligations” was an important consideration as well. Lastly, the uncertainty associated with a “potential revised growth trend during the major CIP update” was given as a significant reason to go conservative with the projections pending completion of the 20-year growth forecast. “Staff anticipates presenting

information in February or March 2014, to provide the Board an opportunity to revisit growth trends used in development of the CIP and TIM Fee programs,” the documents note.

District 5 Supervisor Norma Santiago and District 1’s Ron Mikulaco questioned the department’s “conservative” recommendation based on some of the data presented by Long Range Planning engineer Claudia Wade. In fact, Wade showed a relatively positive picture of recent housing activity in the county. The Housing Permit Forecast for FY 2013-2014 was 104, however between July 1 and Oct. 31 of this year, that projection has already been 88 percent met by receipt of 91 permit applications. “Why the slow climb given the actual data?” Santiago asked.

Assistant Director for the Long Range Planning Division, Dave Defanti cautioned the board not to jump ahead too soon. “We’re just on the brink, getting ready for major updating,” Defanti said. “Forecasting, while based on science is also an art.”

Wade had also assured supervisors that whatever direction they gave “we can revise and update” our projections.

Kris Payne, former engineer with the county’s department of transportation gave his view on projections. “The only data I trust are the actuals,” Payne said and continued to point out that every Tuesday board meeting offers the opportunity for supervisors to approve more development which “causes the need for a road system, not just one road.” In effect, a development in one area affects transportation issues far beyond its immediate neighborhood, and that is a critical factor in long-range planning. Payne concluded his remarks by noting that “It’s a very complex issue.”

Sue Taylor of Camino challenged the board on several issues related to development. She said the county is already on the hook for \$50 million for prior infrastructure development. “Get back to reality,” Taylor urged. “We need more jobs instead of more houses.” Taylor, a former candidate for District 3 Supervisor has regularly opposed some development policies especially the Community Region designation for Camino and Pollock Pines and is a major voice in efforts to “keep the county rural.”

El Dorado Hills activist Bill Welty described traffic and congestion on Highway 50 in the west county reminding supervisors that at times the Level of Service is rated “F” that is failing and that the county’s Measure Y should prohibit many of the assumptions on which the housing projections are based. Mikulaco was concerned enough with the data and methodology being presented that he was a lone “no” vote on the motion to adopt the “long slow climb” approach to the permit forecast update.