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Survey says yes to open space, no to homes

While supporting a healthy mix of urban and rural charm, El Dorado Hills residents who participated in the community survey don't necessarily back more rooftops.

This and many other survey results were discussed last Wednesday night inside the packed El Dorado Hills Community Services District pavilion.

The El Dorado Hills Community Economic Development Advisory Committee zoning subcommittee chairman John Hidahl led the discussion and introduced Chris Aguirre from AIM consulting (which created the 17-question survey) to break down results. The survey was step one toward establishing a local community identity or vision that would be passed on to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission for use as they consider area development and policy/program updates.

The discussion began with a breakdown of captured demographic information. The largest percentage of respondents live east of El Dorado Hills Boulevard. Females represented 54 percent of respondents and 39 percent live in El Dorado Hills but work elsewhere. There was buzz when it was noted 3 percent of respondents may work in El Dorado Hills, but don't live here.

The majority of questions measured participants' perceptions regarding residential and commercial land use, job development, transportation, recreation, open space and community identity. One question asked if respondents would like to retain El Dorado Hills' "mixture of urban and rural charm;" 91 percent agreed.

Aguirre noted key takeaways and popular responses. Most people agree El Dorado Hills has sufficient housing, yet a majority said they want more public open space and parks.

At the end of the analysis, Aguirre presented summary slides that stated the following:

- **Additional housing is not overwhelmingly supported in the area.**
- **A desire for more commercial development in specific areas:** 38 percent of respondents said El Dorado Hills could use more retail and a large number of respondents felt there needed to be more shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities. Comments also indicated that commercial development should be located in existing centers and that residents did not want to become like Folsom. One survey participant stated, "Town Center needs 2-3 more blocks of small retail to create and sustain any retail synergy necessary to make it a viable Town Center."
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- **Open spaces valued:** Several comments lamented the loss of the golf course. A majority of respondents rated both natural and developed open space as "need more."
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- **Residents seem supportive of attracting industry that provides quality jobs:** A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was important to attract and recruit businesses that provide quality jobs. Comments indicate that specific jobs are preferable in order to assure quality employment and maintain the demographic characteristics of the area.
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- **Road improvements must be responsive to new developments and mindful of pedestrian and bicycle access:** Respondents seemed reluctant to support new developments but if development moves forward, the transportation infrastructure should be developed accordingly.
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- **The community strongly supports a community sports complex and a multi-use network of trails:** A majority strongly agreed or agreed that a community sports complex would be a good addition. Comments supported expanding trails in El Dorado County.

The potential for a community sports complex was a running example throughout the evening of what residents want. “How are you going to pay for it?” Tom Howard of Parker Development finally asked.

Attendees asked many questions, mostly looking for more details, throughout the one-hour presentation. For instance, what would a community sports complex look like? Would it be indoor or outdoor? Instead of key takeaways, many asked to see the raw data. Near the end of the presentation one person asked, “Will the county even listen to us?”

“The survey is only the first step. This is just to get the dialogue started in a much larger conversation,” said Hidahl. “During the second phase CEDAD-EDH will slice and dice the data further and will ask for more scoping (or specific details) in a second survey in April or May.”

Several times Hidahl explained a long, detailed survey upfront would’ve deterred people from responding.

As for whether the county planners and supervisors will listen, Hidahl said the best way to ensure that is for residents to attend public meetings and voice their opinions.

“In late February the Board of Supervisors are expected to kick off the approval process for the updated General Plan,” said Hidahl. “There are meetings scheduled between the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission for them to look at the General Plan review process, which is called LUPPU. In March a draft EIR will be released for public comment and in May planning commission hearings will be held. As soon as we know specific dates for these discussions at the Board of Supervisors’ or planning commission meetings we will post them on our website.

“We encourage as much public participation as possible,” continued Hidahl. “That’s what influences decision making. Don’t wait for someone to summarize the draft EIR for you in May. That’s when the public comment period will be over. Take the time to at least read the sections you’re interested in whether it be land use, business, traffic or trails and comment early. If you can’t attend the meetings, send your comments in writing.”

To view survey results and stay updated regarding meetings visit speakupedh.org.