



COLUSA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting #2 – October 13, 2010

Steering Committee members Bob Alvernaz (at-large), Jack Baber (Reclamation District #1004), Charles Bergson (City of Williams), Denise Erickson (Family Action Centers of Colusa County), Ben Felt (Colusa County Chamber of Commerce), Ed Hulbert (Colusa Industrial Properties), Ashley Indrieri (Family Water Alliance), Nancy Loudon (Soroptomists International of Colusa County), Bill Lovelace (at-large), Jim Reading (Colusa Lions Club), Kay Spurgeon (Colusa County Office of Education), Rachelle Valverde (Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District), Darrin Williams (Colusa County Resource Conservation District), and Kathy Yerxa (at-large) were present.

An opportunity for public comment was provided; no public comment was received. The two topics of discussion for the meeting were Agriculture and Economic Development.

Agriculture

There was general consensus on all issues related to open space. The Steering Committee identified the following priorities and concerns for the General Plan Update:

- Overall, the County's current approach to agriculture and farming works well.
 - Farmers have plenty of interaction with the Agricultural Commissioner.
 - The County has relatively low interaction with farming operations and it should stay that way.
- Protecting water rights for agricultural use is a top priority.
 - County should support agricultural water rights, delivery system, and supply and assist in resolving issues with other agencies such as California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, etc.
 - Increase County influence on water rights and distribution legislation at the state and federal levels.
- Encourage growth in the agricultural industry by reducing regulations, providing permit-streamlining, and encouraging vertical integration for agricultural-related developments on farmland.
 - Agricultural-related industrial operations and development, such as processing, assembly, distribution and other support uses should be allowed by right in the agricultural General Plan designations and not require a General Plan Amendment nor a zoning change.
 - Solar and other alternative energy systems should be allowed on farmland to provide power for on-site needs.

- Rather than requiring a conditional use permit for the above uses, the Zoning Ordinance could incorporate performance standards to address environmental impact mitigation and compatibility with surrounding uses.
- Currently a lot of agricultural products are sent outside of the County for processing. By encouraging agricultural-related facilities on farmland, more jobs and revenue will stay in Colusa County.
- Zoning regulations should be flexible so that farms can take advantage of new technologies and processes.
- DIVERGING OPINIONS: Many supported the County's previous practice of less interaction and less regulation over agriculture. However, there were several that noted a need for the County to address some agricultural practices, such as drainage and flood impacts. It was suggested that farmers be educated regarding best management practices (BMPs) and be encouraged to implement BMPs to address agricultural drainage and runoff issues. Further discussion on flood and drainage issues discussion will occur at Steering Committee meeting #4 (Circulation and Safety).
- There was general consensus that converting agricultural lands to habitat conservation lands has a negative effect on agricultural lands.
 - Key issues associated with conversion to habitat conservation include loss of tax revenue to the County, vandalism, trespassing, and introduction of pests, rodents, and weeds that interfere with agricultural activities. The Carter Ranch was provided as an example.
 - Develop a mechanism to ensure that the County has oversight and authority of conversions from farmland to habitat mitigation land. This could include requiring a Conditional Use Permit, a General Plan Amendment, or require a zone change so that the County can consider each project individually and require suitable mitigation measures, including buffers, so that agricultural uses are not impacted.
 - Concerns that Colusa County is becoming the Wetlands Mitigation Bank for Sacramento were raised. It is preferable that habitat conservation in Colusa County benefit development in Colusa County.
 - Need to consider disposition of water rights from agricultural conversions and make sure that water stays local.
- DIVERGING OPINIONS: There were mixed feelings regarding a concept to establish a farmland conversion mitigation program. Most members opposed any penalties for conversions indicating there is sufficient farmland in the County and that economic development could be slowed down if additional fees are added. However, several members supported the idea.
 - One suggestion was that conversions should be monitored and if conversions become a significant problem in the future, then a program could be developed.

- If an agricultural mitigation fee program is enacted, it was recommended that: 1) development of agriculture-supporting uses be exempt from mitigation, and 2) mitigation fees only be used to preserve farmland within Colusa County.

Economic Development

The Steering Committee identified the following priorities and concerns for the General Plan Update:

- The County has a good reputation for working with businesses to expand and to locate in area. However, more needs to be done to improve the County's business climate to make it more attractive to new business.
- Provide incentives and permit-streamlining to attract and retain businesses.
 - Incentives could include property tax abatement/deferrals (these are successful in other areas) and deferred development impact fees.
 - Speed of processing the development application is the highest priority for potential businesses.
- Focus on attracting agriculture-supporting sectors, such as, agricultural processing, distribution, manufacturing, shipping, and assembly.
- Commodity processing is key to economic development. Rice bran processing is a future sector the County should be looking at.
- Support the Chamber of Commerce as the lead economic development agency, through funding and policies, rather than establishing a County-administered economic development program. The County does not need an Economic Development Coordinator.
- Support efforts of the Chamber and the cities to create a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to improve the County's economic climate.
- Be creative in attracting businesses and be more competitive than nearby communities.
- Brand the County as "business friendly." Need marketing materials to provide businesses. JPA is working on these types of materials.
- Don't focus only on attracting new businesses. Also assist existing businesses so they can expand and thrive.
- DIVERGING OPINIONS: Some of the Committee members felt strongly that more drastic measures need to be taken to attract new industry to the County, such as reduced application and building permit fees, reduced property taxes (property tax abatement or deferral) to make the County more competitive with other Counties. However, some members raised concerns with the impact these measures might have on the County's ability to provide services and to maintain an adequate budget.