



COLUSA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting #5 – December 15, 2010

Steering Committee members Ben Felt (Colusa County Chamber of Commerce), Ashley Indrieri (Family Water Alliance), Ed Hulbert (Colusa Industrial Properties), Ashley Indrieri (Family Water Alliance), Lester Miller (at-large) County), Jim Reading (Colusa Lions Club), Kay Spurgeon (Colusa County Office of Education), Bryan Stice (City of Colusa), Gary Teragawa (Colusa Regional Medical Center), Rachelle Valverde (Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District), and Mary Wells (at-large) were present.

Public Comment

An opportunity for public comment was provided; no public comments were provided. The two topics of discussion for the meeting were Noise and Conservation.

General Business

DATE CHANGE: The February 2, 2011 Steering Committee meeting was changed to February 9, 2011.

Noise

Luke Saxelby of j.c. brennan & associates, the noise consultant for the General Plan team, provided an overview of the requirements for a General Plan Noise Element, described major existing noise sources in the County, and discussed parameters for the evaluation of noise impacts as well as available noise mitigation strategies. There was general consensus among the Steering Committee regarding issues related to noise. The Committee identified the following information, priorities and concerns for the General Plan Update:

Existing Noise Sources

- Steering Committee identified numerous existing sources of noise within the County, including:
 - Vehicle traffic noise, primarily along the I-5 and SR 20 corridors
 - Noise from agricultural operations, including crop duster planes, and heavy equipment, industrial processing facilities (such as rice dryers and tomato canneries)
 - Noise from off-highway vehicles (OHVs), particular in the northwestern areas of the County near the Mendocino National Forest and Stonyford
 - Gunshot noise from hunting and recreational shooting activities
 - Airport operations
 - Industrial operations

- There was general consensus that these noise sources are a result of the County's agricultural, rural and recreational lifestyles, and that new residents moving to the County should be aware of these existing noise sources and learn to accept them as a way of life in the County.

Establishing Acceptable Exterior Noise Standards for Residential and Noise Sensitive Areas

- The Steering Committee discussed the pros and cons of establishing high or low noise thresholds for residential areas.
 - Higher (louder) noise thresholds were determined to be appropriate along existing major transportation corridors, such as the I-5 corridor
 - In general, new development should adapt to existing noise sources within the County
 - New development should be required to mitigate for the creation of new noise sources that impact existing residences in the County
- Agricultural businesses and operations must be protected from future noise complaints from residences in the County. The General Plan should reference the County's right-to-farm ordinance and ensure that new developments include noise disclosure statements. The Committee acknowledged the importance and the noisy characteristics of the County's agricultural and industrial uses; that these operations need to be given priority over residential uses. Residential uses need to accommodate farming noise impacts, particularly during seasonal noise peaks between August and October when there is significant crop dusting, tractor operation and processing activity.
- Future planning efforts for the Sites Reservoir area should include areas protected from higher noise levels from recreational activities. The County should ensure that it has an opportunity to comment on and influence the location of and exposure to noise generating uses. Areas for habitat and species conservation should be identified.

Mitigation for Noise Impacts

- The General Plan should allow for a range of options to mitigate noise impacts.
 - Soundwalls should be allowed, but are generally discouraged and are not a preferred noise mitigation strategy
 - If soundwalls are installed, they should be well designed and well maintained
 - The "tunnel effect" from soundwalls should be avoided
 - The use of landscaped berms for noise attenuation is desirable, provided that the berms include attractive landscaping, are properly maintained, and do not impose undue financial hardships on developers.
 - Setbacks and buffers between noise sensitive uses and noise generating uses are a desirable approach to noise mitigation

- In instances where interface between new residential uses near noisy circulation corridors is unavoidable, the noise standards should be more restrictive for residential interior noise, whereby more sound attenuation can be incorporated into residential construction
- Strategic land use planning that places residential areas away from noise generating uses such as industrial areas and major transportation routes is the preferred approach to reducing potential noise impacts. Commercial land uses may be used to buffer noise between the freeway, industrial, and residential land uses.
- The CEQA review process is the most practical way to reduce noise impacts from future development.

Conservation

There was general consensus on issues related to conservation. The Steering Committee identified the following priorities and concerns:

- The County should develop a “coordination strategy” for dealing with federal and state agencies when federal or state conservation areas or easements are proposed.
 - Protecting existing water rights and protecting existing agricultural operations are key concerns
- Increased participation by federal and state agencies with respect to conservation planning in the County should be discouraged.
- The creation of new Wilderness Areas should be discouraged.
- Resource conservation areas should include active management of the land:
 - Forested areas should be strategically harvested and managed to reduce the risk of wildfire and maintain the health of the forest
 - Resource conservation areas should remain open to public use to the greatest extent feasible
 - Human use of the land should be strongly considered when developing management plans for resource conservation areas
 - One member noted a concern that existing conservation programs that limit public use of conservation lands results in condensing recreation activities to smaller areas, creating an undesirable concentration of recreational uses on smaller areas which increases adverse impacts
- Access to public lands, particularly the Sacramento River and the Mendocino National Forest should be improved.
- Conservation easements should not infringe upon or adversely impact adjacent agricultural activities.
- Green building practices should be encouraged and promoted.

- Incentives should be provided to promote green building practices. Possible incentives include: permit fee reductions, streamlined permit reviews, and density bonuses.
- While the Steering Committee did not support a mandatory green building ordinance, it was recommended that residential development projects be required to provide an energy-efficient/green option that homebuyers.
- Consider requiring energy-efficiency for larger projects, but individual homeowners and small-scale developers should not be required to provide energy-efficiency measures beyond those required by the building code.
- The County should encourage the development of alternative energy sources, including: solar and biomass.
- Home-based offices should be encouraged and supported.
- The Steering Committee did not support the development of a County-wide Climate Action Plan.
- The Committee concurred with the current General Plan Program strategy to implement AB 32 to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) through:
 - Maintaining rural character and lifestyle of the County and preserve open space
 - Focus new development around existing communities
 - Preserve agricultural lands, heritage and lifestyle
 - Increase local employment opportunities
- Historical preservation efforts should primarily be done at the County level, such as the establishment of a County Historical Register, in order to not encumber properties with federal and state restrictions
- State or federal historical protection status should only be sought for properties that are significant cultural resources, public or quasi-public properties, and where the protection status would provide grant funding or other beneficial resources.
- The Steering Committee supports the expansion of local historical preservation efforts, provided the property owner is a willing participant. Property owners should be incentivized to preserve and protect historical structures. Possible incentives include: reduced fees for retrofits, inclusion in historical tourism marketing efforts.
- Air quality regulations should continue to be administered through the Air Pollution Control District.