

County General Plan passed with concerns

Some say plan is inadequate

By Christine Burkhart, staff writer

Porterville Recorder, Thursday, Aug. 30, 2012

After six and a half hours devoted to presentations and testimony throughout Tuesday afternoon and evening, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors concluded a general plan update effort which has been nearly a decade in the making.

With the approval of a work program in summer of 2003, the county first set about constructing a plan which will cover land use until 2030. The Board agreed, by consensus, that the final draft of the GPU 2030, as well as the latest draft of the Environmental Impact Report and Climate Action Plan, were ready, with an addition compiled and read by Supervisor Steven Worthley, which added a preface to the general plan "that would put it in context of our responsibilities as elected officials."

The preface stated that in the creation of the document, the county is upholding citizen's constitutional right to private property, and it concludes saying that the ultimate goal of the GPU is to balance private property rights with the county's policing responsibilities.

Many who attended the meeting disagreed with the idea that the plan was ready. Most of the individuals or groups that testified spoke against the current draft of the plan or the accompanying environmental impact report because of concerns about water conservation and quality, [air quality](#), the growth of new towns and the foothills growth plan, land use in terms of preserving agricultural lands and focusing growth to existing communities. A couple of people stated that they were concerned the Board would move forward with the plan, flawed as it is, simply because it has taken too long to compile, and that in doing so, the county might face potential litigation.

The first speaker of the day, when the public commentary period opened at 4 p.m, was Robert Keenan, of Home Builders Association of Tulare, who spoke on the developer impact fees outlined in the GPU.

"We believe the fees are illegal. The county has no authority to create or have fees charged within incorporated cities," Keenan said.

Keenan pointed out that dual fees discourages industrial development, causing a loss of potential jobs and property taxes. Patricia Stever Blattler, executive director of the Tulare County Farm Bureau, spoke on behalf of farmers, warning against the fact that the county has allowed too much non-agricultural development in agricultural lands.

"We have to protect the ability to farm," Stever Blattler said.

Gary Adest warned that there are inconsistencies in the latest draft of the General Plan which will open the County to legal challenges.

"As a tax payer, my concern is about the decision the board is about to make and the consequences of a yes vote on the plan as submitted. The general plan is flawed in that it is internally inconsistent to its stated goals," Adest said, adding that the changes, or lack thereof, especially to the foothill plan "almost a guarantee that you will be in conflict with your air, water quality and transportation plans."

Gary Schwaller of Three Rivers said that the plan should have put a stop to new towns.

"Have you ever seen anyone undevelop a new development?" Schwaller said. "The General Plan Update should discourage or outright ban the development of new towns."

For those who spoke up on the subjects of air and water quality, the “Healthy Growth Alternative”, proposed by the Tulare County Coalition for Responsible Growth, was brought up numerous times, first by Karen Bodner as a representative of the TCCRG, then later with Terry Manning of Springville, who flat-out asked why the county had abandoned the recommendation, and Mary Lou Burbery, on behalf of the Women League of voters, who said the county needed to look at the recommendations again, for the sake of children growing up here. Burbery noted that the plan failed to ensure clean air and water for future generations.

While positive commentators were in the minority, those who did felt the county had worked on the document long enough. Former Supervisor Bill Maize stood to voice such an opinion, advising the Board to pass the plan, saying that their decision could not be dictated by the “loudest voices in this room.”

“I want to voice my support for the general plan you have before you today,” Maze said. “Businesses cannot wait any longer to chart their long-term business plans.”

Maze also mentioned that so many problems faced by the county in creating the plan have originated because of a state versus county political climate, which is causing “reactionary policies” to be enacted.