

City-center growth plan targets air pollution goals Hundreds of sites listed for possible development

Stockton Record, Thursday, February 9, 2012

A new development plan rolling out this week in a series of public meeting looks inward for areas of growth in San Joaquin County, focusing on places near city centers and transportation hubs instead of sprawling into the countryside.

It offers 263 potential spots for this growth to occur and a method of measuring the impact of projects on these sites. It's not binding, and the sites aren't set in stone, but planners say the draft plan released by the San Joaquin Council of Governments will help the region meet tough state standards to curb greenhouse gas emissions. The standards were adopted to ward off climate change by reducing emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

In the process, the plan encourages vibrant city centers where people can live, work and play without always needing to use a car.

A significant amount of growth is coming to San Joaquin County over the next 20 years, according to the preamble to the Regional Smart Growth and Transit Oriented Development Plan. "The location, character, and density of this development have the power to put the region on a path toward environmental sustainability. However, this will occur only if each jurisdiction plans wisely for its own future," the report reads.

The draft plan, prepared by The Planning Center and DC & E consulting with a \$300,000 grant from the California Department of Transportation, was presented at meetings in Tracy and Lodi on Wednesday. Planners will talk about it in Stockton tonight and bring it to Ripon next week.

The Council of Governments' draft comes amid a flurry of activity on the planning front, particularly in Stockton, which released a Climate Action Plan this week and is awaiting a report Friday from a team of experts with the Urban Land Institute visiting the city.

The various efforts complement what the city wants to do, particularly in the downtown area, said David Stagnaro, a planning manager with the city's Community Development Department.

And from bus hubs to rail stations, Stockton already has much of the infrastructure in place for transit-oriented development, he said. To that end, the city has been paying close attention to a five-block stretch on the eastern edge of downtown that holds both the San Joaquin Regional Transit District's transit center and the Stockton stop for the Altamont Commuter Express, Stagnaro said. "That is a prime corridor for in-fill development," he said.

In general, it's more efficient to put homes close to transit and services, and people won't have to drive as much, he said, adding, "Maybe the two-car households of yesterday get to be the one-car households of tomorrow."

Under terms of a settlement with the state over climate change rules, the city bumped up its General Plan to call for 4,000 residential units downtown, he said.

The 263 in-fill sites in the COG report range in size from a fraction of an acre to 241 acres, and more than half of the sites are in Stockton. The rest fall elsewhere in county urban areas, like Tracy's downtown Bow-tie area and Ripon's Main Street.

The report also sets a base line for county greenhouse gas emissions to measure progress. In 2005, 6.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide were produced from county sources. Of that, 2.9 million tons, or nearly 45 percent, came from vehicles.

The report includes evaluation tools that it uses on 50 of the proposed sites. In one prototype development that combines retail and residences on 187 acres in downtown Stockton, the report finds the smart-growth project reduces vehicle miles traveled by 62 percent when compared to a "business-as-usual" development.

The prototypes, however, suggest that current market conditions show that smart-growth development needs subsidies to be realistic, according to the report.

In 2006, county voters agreed to spend \$65 million on smart-growth programs when they reapproved Measure K, a half-cent sales tax. The money won't pay for housing, but it can be used to pay for improvements that support smart growth, said Sam Kaur, a COG planner. The money could help create well-lit and walkable public spaces that are a part of smart-growth development, she said. Grants already have been awarded to projects to spruce up Lodi Avenue in Lodi and Weber Avenue in Stockton.

Grants are competitive, and the COG draft plan will give cities more information about showing where particular needs are.

"This is to give them a tool – a road map to compete for those funds in the future," Kaur said.

Meetings

Planners will be talking about the draft Regional Smart Growth and Transit Oriented Development Plan at a series of public meetings beginning this week. The locations are:

- Stockton, today, 6 p.m. COG boardroom, 555 East Weber Ave.
- Ripon, Wednesday, 6 p.m., City Hall, 259 North Wilma Ave.

To read the plan, go to the San Joaquin Council of Governments website: www.sicog.org.

Climate plan for Stockton has hefty price tag

City's settlement with state does not mandate adoption of all strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Thursday, February 9, 2012

The city has a tentative plan to combat climate change, more than three years after reaching a legal settlement with the Sierra Club and then-Attorney General Jerry Brown.

Whether the plan will ever be put into action is another question.

The climate plan – released this week – proposes reducing Stockton's greenhouse gas emissions by 10 percent below 2005 levels, using more than two dozen voluntary and mandatory strategies to make buildings more energy efficient, get people out of their cars and reduce water consumption and waste, among other things.

It wouldn't be cheap. If adopted by the Stockton City Council later this year, the plan could cost the city \$28.5 million and could cost the private sector \$240 million, the document says.

In a memo to the city's Climate Action Plan Advisory Committee on Monday, Deputy City Manager Mike Locke wrote that city staffers have "concerns about the financial viability of the plan as presented."

"The city's financial position is well known and has markedly deteriorated since 2008 when the settlement agreement was executed," Locke wrote, adding that staffers are worried about the plan's effect on the city's economic recovery.

The settlement does not require the council to adopt the plan. It merely must be submitted for consideration.

The plan itself acknowledges it would require "substantial effort on the part of the entire Stockton community" at a time when people are struggling to pay their bills and keep businesses open.

It adds, however, that in some cases the city and its residents and businesses would actually save money over the long-term.

For example, homeowners who remodel their homes to be energy efficient might save on heating and air conditioning.

The plan would reduce Stockton's carbon footprint by more than 564,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide - about the same as taking 100,000 passenger cars off the road each year, or reducing gasoline consumption by 60 million gallons.

It could have beneficial side effects, too, such as reducing air pollution.

Cost aside, the release of the draft plan is a significant step in what has been a lengthy process.

"It's a milestone, after working on it for so long," said city planning manager David Stagnaro.

Now it's the public's turn to participate. Comments on the plan will be accepted through March 29, about the same time that the first of three community workshops will be held.

San Joaquin Council of Governments pushes smart growth

By Ross Farrow

Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, February 9, 2012

You made your weekly drive to the supermarket, but you forgot to get some milk. Wouldn't you like to be able to just walk or ride your bicycle to get that item or two you forgot?

That's one of the ideas about "smart growth," a concept being promoted by San Joaquin County's regional planning agency as a way to reduce the level of greenhouse gasses.

About a dozen Lodi-area residents, along with city employees from Lodi and other communities, attended a workshop Wednesday night at the Lodi Police Department's community room to hear what smart growth is all about.

Consultant David Early from The Planning Center explained that smart growth generally encourages infill development linking residential, commercial and transportation centers while discouraging new housing on farms or the periphery of towns.

A draft smart growth plan for infill development throughout San Joaquin County, accessible on the San Joaquin Council of Governments' website, has been prepared for public review. Lodi has 41 potential sites alone that can be developed to encourage more walking and bicycling as an alternative to getting into the car, Early said.

Most of the 41 sites are near the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, where development could close enough that residents can walk to the Lodi Transit Station and either take a bus to Stockton or Galt, or hop onto an Amtrak train.

Other sites are along Kettleman Lane, some southeast of Kettleman and Ham lanes, and others north of Kettleman, on both sides of Mills Avenue. Another site shown on the draft map is east of Lower Sacramento Road, north of the Target shopping center.

The Council of Governments has no direct land-use authority, Early said. The regional planning council can't force the Lodi City Council or the other six cities to do anything they don't want to do, nor can it force property owners to do anything, Early added.

However, there are financial incentives to incorporate smart-growth planning methods, Early said. A total of \$65 million in federal, state and county Measure K transportation funds will be available during the next 30 years to property owners who develop their land or existing buildings to encourage walking and bicycling.

The smart growth plan was prepared after the state Legislature adopted Senate Bill 375 and Assembly Bill 32, which require cities and counties throughout the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Early said. In San Joaquin County, that amounts to a 5-percent reduction.

Wednesday's meeting attracted Cherene Sandidge, a consultant hired by a family who owns several properties on Sacramento, Elm, Pine and School streets. The family considered refurbishing their buildings — some are occupied and some aren't — until the smart growth concept was introduced through AB 32, adopted in 2006. Now the owners want Sandidge to find out what this smart growth is all about, she said.

"I'm really sold on Downtown Lodi," Sandidge, who lives in the East Bay community of Hercules, said after the workshop.

Sandidge said she would like to see a variety of housing to keep families geographically closer together.

City Councilman Larry Hansen, Lodi's representative on the Council of Governments, said that Lodi's general plan is consistent with smart growth principles.

Hansen, who didn't attend Wednesday's workshop, said he doesn't see changes to Lodi's planning for growth.

"It's just a tool we can use," he said.

Lockeford resident Richard Eklund asked if the smart growth plan would affect his community and other small towns in the county. Early responded that the draft plan is limited to the seven cities and the Mountain House community west of Tracy.

Another workshop on smart growth is scheduled for 6 p.m. today in the Council of Governments board room, 555 E. Weber Ave., Stockton, and on Feb. 15 in Ripon.

The draft plan can be found at www.sjcog.org. Scroll down to "Regional Smart Growth/Transit Oriented Development" and click "Draft Plan." Comments may be made through Feb. 29 to Sam Kaur at iKaur@sjcog.org. For more information, call 209-235-0583.

Planners may vote today on Jesse Morrow mining project

By Kurtis Alexander, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2012

The Fresno County Planning Commission is scheduled to decide today whether to allow mining on Jesse Morrow Mountain.

Mexican cement giant Cemex is applying for a permit to operate a hardrock quarry on the prominent foothill east of Sanger. The 824-acre project would include a processing plant to turn the mined rock into construction material.

County planners are recommending the commission allow the mining to proceed. The commission meets at 8:45 on the third floor of the county Hall of Records. The hearing is open to the public.

The plan, which has been in the works for more than a decade, has drawn opposition from people worried about disturbing the mountain landscape.

Fears range from increased air pollution to upheaval of sacred Native American sites to noise and traffic along Highway 180 about 20 miles east of Fresno.

Cemex has scaled back its original plan in the wake of protest. The latest proposal calls for mining 100 acres instead of 400 and operating for 50 years instead of 100. The result would be about 25% less aggregate.

The new plan hasn't assuaged community concern.

But Cemex and many in the construction industry say the material is needed in the Valley to support future building projects and a growing economy.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Thursday, Feb. 9, 2012:](#)

Can we afford more air pollution?

Regarding "Can Californians afford cleaner cars?" (Editorial, Feb. 3): Cleaner cars are in growing demand because they bring Californians healthier air and lower consumer costs as well as reducing our costly addiction to petroleum.

Today's cars run on dirty fuels and spew pollution that contributes to asthma attacks, heart attacks, lost school and workdays and even premature deaths. Dependence on dirty cars and fuels threatens our children's future. Recent research by the American Lung Association in California found that by pursuing a cleaner car future, not only would consumers save money at the pump, our residents would avoid more than \$7 billion in annual health care, environmental and energy costs when compared with today's fleet.

The California Air Resources Board's new clean car standards make sense if we want fewer asthma attacks and other health emergencies due to air pollution, and if we want our children and grandchildren to have a sustainable future in the Golden State.

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[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Thursday, Feb. 9, 2012:](#)

Consumers do want cleaner cars

It's certainly true that buyers will be key to reaching California's cleaner cars goal ("Can Californians afford cleaner cars? Feb. 3), but we part company on the idea that consumers aren't interested.

Californians want cleaner choices. A recent Consumer Reports survey of California residents found that 75 percent agree California should require automakers to build more zero-emission vehicles.

And it's not just Californians. A 2011 Consumer Reports national survey showed a majority (56 percent) of consumers would consider a hybrid, electric, or hydrogen fuel cell for their next vehicle. Seventy-two percent would consider purchasing one of these over the next 15 years.

While cleaner vehicles tend to cost more upfront than their gasoline counterparts, the fuel savings are expected to outweigh the additional cost. The CARB rules are expected to save \$3 for every \$1 invested. More money in consumers' pockets and a shield from unpredictable gas prices are an easy sell.

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