



Butte
Environmental
Council

BUTTE
COUNTY
MAY 30 2008
DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES

May 30, 2008

Dear Butte County Planning Commission:

My name is Mike McLaughlin and I am reading the following comments and questions on behalf of Barbara Vlamis and Butte Environmental Council's 800 members. Why do we again tolerate expensive, counterproductive general plan processes to create the illusion of planning, transparency, and inclusion? The County spent approximately \$400,000 on a general plan update in the early 1990s and then aborted it. Today, vested interests, facilitated by Butte County staff and its consultants, are playing a pivotal role in continuing an antiquated planning model that seeks private profit at public cost. Climate change, water insecurity, broken local, state and federal budgets, constrained land, escalating oil prices and diminishing supply, and growing food instability cry out for attention, but ostrich-like effort is leading the general plan update in Butte County.

Below are just a few examples of the problems, some suggested solutions, and BEC's planning principles.

Dysfunctional Process

- The process is driving the results – specific land uses should never have been pursued before policy and constraints are established.
- Constraints on land use have not been provided in a form that would educate the CAC and public (e.g. maps with all the constraints identified).
- The expertise of the Citizen's Advisory Committee is not utilized.
- CAC members have or might have serious conflicts of interest in the outcome, yet votes on land use are majority rule and not consensus, despite the fact that one third to one half of the members have abandoned the meetings.
- The consultants and staff govern the process instead of the CAC by consensus.
- Reviewing growth areas (lets be honest with language) by fielding "offers" from developers is contrary to the best interests of the county and the cities and town.
- Allowing developers and consultants to advocate for projects during a planning process demonstrates a major bias.

- In contrast to the communication received and presented by developers, the input from the public and local experts is not valued at all, let alone there exists a mechanism to weigh the value of the comments

Possible Solutions

- Evaluate the current process.
- Halt the discussion of growth areas.
- Move to a CAC governed by itself with a consensus process.
- Prepare a comprehensive constraints map of the entire county.
- Formulate policy.
- Provide members of the public with more than 60 seconds to speak publicly and provide a process in which staff or consultants respond, tabulate, and weigh the significance of the communication from all parties.
- Solicit more expert input.

Planning Principles

- ◆ BEC maintains that the health and well being of the human population is intrinsically tied to the variety and vitality of the agricultural and natural lands in this region.
- ◆ BEC supports strengthening existing communities and neighborhoods through policies that redirect public and private investment away from sprawl development and toward more compact urban form.
- ◆ BEC envisions new development inside spheres of influence boundaries so land is used efficiently, public infrastructure is affordable and available, agricultural lands of all kinds are preserved, natural resources are maintained or enhanced, air, and water quality are improved, and a strong alternative transportation fabric is facilitated.
- ◆ BEC advocates for economic vitality through the protection of Butte County's ground water, surface water, recreational opportunities, wildlands, and all agricultural lands.

If the county would like to engage the interested and expert members of the public in the future, please call us.

Michael McLaughlin for Barbara Vlamis

Butte Environmental Council