

Butte County General Plan 2030 Planning Commission
Study Session Summary
June 13, 2008

The Butte County Planning Commission held meeting #4-3C on Friday, June 13, 2008, the third and final of three Planning Commission Study Sessions in Meeting Series #4 (Evaluation & Selection of a Preferred Land Use Alternative). The meeting was held in the Butte County Board Chambers in Oroville. Four Planning Commissioners were present, including Chair Harrel Wilson, Nina Lambert, Richard Leland and Chuck Nelson. Commissioner Fernando Marin was absent due to the Humboldt Fire in his Paradise district. Chair Harrel Wilson was also absent for the portion of the meeting during which the Planning Commission discussed Study Areas 6, 9, 14, 5, 16, 17, 18 and 19, due to fire activity near his home near Oroville.

Introduction and Meeting Overview

Tim Snellings, Butte County Development Services Director, introduced the meeting and provided an overview of the study session agenda. Mr. Snellings also reminded the Planning Commission that the preferred land use alternative does not provide any entitlements to landowners or developers, and asked that the Commissioners refrain from discussing specific projects. Discussions should be at a conceptual level rather than about specific proposals.

Biggs and Gridley Area Preferred Alternative Discussion

Tanya Sundberg, Associate at DC&E, provided an overview of the preferred alternative for the Biggs and Gridley area. This overview included a slide show of maps to illustrate each of the alternatives, the CAC's voting history for the study areas and the CAC's recommended preferred land use alternative.

The Commissioners asked several questions about the urban reserve designation that was recommended by the CAC. There are several urban reserves in place under the existing General Plan. One such designation was in the Chico area, and land in this area was successfully developed by the City of Chico. Other urban reserves in the Oroville and Paradise areas have not yet been developed. Currently, the urban reserve designations are specific to each area, which could also continue under the new

General Plan. The County receives inquiries about development in these urban reserves, to which County staff responds with information about the needs that must be met before any development can occur. The urban reserve designation could include a time limit for the development to occur by the city. The General Plan 2030 process will consider growth both for the entire county, including development under the cities in the urban reserves, and the unincorporated county.

Following the meeting overview, Andrea Redamonti, Planning Director for the City of Gridley, and Pete Carr, City Manager for the City of Biggs, were invited to provide comments to the Planning Commission about the Biggs and Gridley area. The City of Gridley is about halfway through its General Plan Update and Sphere of Influence Amendment. The City Council has approved a preferred land use alternative. It is important to the City that any land use designations in the area around the city be consistent with the City's adopted vision. The City concurs with the Urban Reserve designation recommended by the CAC. This designation promotes sensible long-term planning, as the City would be able to specify where growth could occur. The City of Gridley would also like the County to address the agriculture buffer issue under the urban reserve designation. The City of Biggs also supports the urban reserve designation, which is considered to be important to the survival of Biggs. The City of Biggs has scaled back the scope of its original General Plan Update, and is now accepting Requests for Proposals for the project, which will be funded by the City. Mr. Carr expects that the General Plan Update will be underway this summer.

Public Comment Period

- ◆ Mike Boeger, a landowner in this area, supports the urban reserve designation because it provides flexibility to the Cities. There are large parcels on the west side of the railroad tracks, but the area is already parcelized on the east side of the railroad. Mr. Boeger expects that the Cities will proceed with moderate growth.

Planning Commission Discussion

The conclusion of the public comment period transitioned into the Planning Commission discussion about the Biggs and Gridley area preferred land use alternative, which includes Study Areas 31 (Biggs Area), 33 (South of Biggs), and 34 (North of Gridley).

The Commissioners voted to confirm the CAC's recommendation for an urban reserve designation in these three study areas. The vote was unanimous.

Following the vote, Mr. Snellings suggested that the Planning Commission discuss the difference between an urban reserve and a specific plan. Mr. Snellings highlighted two existing specific plans, the North Chico Specific Plan and the Stringtown Mountain Specific Plan, which have been in place for years. Specific plans today tend to be different than those from the past. They typically cover large areas and include a focus on design guidelines for the plan area. These plans are often developed in order to avoid a piecemeal approach to development.

Commissioner Leland noted that an urban reserve designation implies that development would occur under a city rather than the County, and in some places, development can only occur under a city due to the need for services. It is possible to create new towns far from city services, which may make fiscal sense, but would be poor planning.

Commissioner Nelson felt that specific plans are more appropriate when dealing with an area that is owned by one person. Commissioners Lambert and Leland questioned how services could be provided in specific plan areas. Commissioner Leland expressed concern over leapfrog development, and suggested that both the spatial and temporal characteristics of development be considered. Some areas should be left for development under future general plans.

The Commission also discussed the revenue-generating potential of the non-residential components of specific plans, and how they can provide jobs near housing.

Chico and North County Area Preferred Alternative Discussion

Steve Peterson, Planning Director for the City of Chico, was invited to provide comments to the Planning Commission on the study areas in the Chico Area. Mr. Peterson referred the Commission to his letter dated April 24, 2008, which outlines City staff's position on the study areas within the City of Chico's Planning Area, including Study Areas 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 14 and 16. It is important that the County plan reflect the City's plans. The City's General Plan process is underway, and they have been collaborating with the County. Mr. Peterson anticipates that a preferred

alternative will be approved by the City Council in mid-September. Given the schedule differences, the County may consider a course correction in the future if the City's preferred alternative is different than that of the County.

Mr. Peterson noted that the CAC's recommended alternative is not consistent in how it addresses City and County coordination. For study areas adjacent to the city, the CAC recommended that only some development occur under the City auspices. The City is better equipped to develop these areas.

Mr. Peterson also discussed the Butte County Association of Government's (BCAG) projection for 20,000 homes to be constructed in Chico by 2030. The City anticipates that it could accommodate 10,000 homes within the existing city limits under current policy. Therefore, it will need to accommodate an additional 10,000 outside of the current city limits. The CAC's recommendation for Study Areas 2, 3 and 9 (the study areas adjacent to the city), in combination with anticipated growth within the existing city limits, can only accommodate 18,000 units, which is less than the BCAG projection. However, as part of the General Plan Update, the City is considering intensifying the land uses within the city, so it is possible that it could accommodate additional units within the existing city limits.

The City is also looking to identify new industrial land, noting Study Area 2 as a possible source. However, the biological and airport constraints in the North Chico Specific Plan area may require a different land use mix than provided under the Specific Plan. Mr. Peterson also mentioned Study Area 14. One of the City's guiding principles is to develop "complete neighborhoods" that have a mix of uses, so the City would likely include a residential component if they were planning for that area.

Commissioner Leland noted that the CAC's recommendation for 18,000 new homes in the Chico area is in the ballpark of the BCAG projection of 20,000 new homes. If the City intensifies its land uses within the existing city limits, it could accommodate even more units. Mr. Peterson agreed, but noted that they would need a prudent reserve of possible units to ensure that there is enough residential land to address their needs.

Public Comment Period

- ◆ John Luvaas, the Chair of the Chico Planning Commission, noted that the City is considering significant policy changes to provide more opportunity for infill and redevelopment. Mr. Luvaas believes that all of the Chico-area growth can be accommodated within the existing city limits. Mr. Luvaas requested that the Planning Commission change the CAC recommendation in Study Areas 2, 3 and 9 to allow the City to plan for growth in these study areas through an urban reserve designation. The City can provide services to Study Area 2, and will need to address traffic issues. In Study Areas 3 and 9, there will be issues regarding farmland protection, open space, groundwater protection and traffic. The City should be able to plan for and deal with those issues themselves.

Study Areas 14, 15 and 16 are not close to town, and may never develop. Jobs should be located close to where people live, especially given high fuel prices. In addition, Oroville needs jobs, and the County should not create competition for jobs in these study areas.

In Study Area 6, there have been development proposals that have failed due to constraints, and Mr. Luvaas expects that the constraints would still prohibit development. In particular, traffic on Highway 32 and impacts on Little Chico Creek would result from development under the CAC's recommendation.

- ◆ Tom Lando spoke primarily about Study Area 15, but noted that unless the Bell Muir area can provide services, Study Area 3 will not develop. Study Area 15 should be viewed as an urban center; Butte College is located near Study Area 15, and there are 31,000 people served by Fire Station #25, which is located in this area. The plan for a research and industrial park is appropriate. There is highway access here, and the majority of the study area would be left open to address the constraints. The creation of an employment center would improve the County's fiscal condition and meets a number of the objectives of the General Plan. A community services district could offset the costs of providing services. The County has already identified this area as appropriate for a research and business park. Commissioner Nelson asked Mr. Lando if he was suggesting that a new town be established in the study area. Mr. Lando indicated that Butte Valley is already a town; current and future residents need services. The current plan for a research and business park has been scaled back from a new town concept considered earlier in the process.

- ◆ Bert Garland, a landowner in Study Area 19, provided a map of existing development at the intersection near this study area. Existing industrial development currently provides 500 jobs. All four corners are either zoned for industrial or commercial development, or are operating with such uses. Mr. Garland has proposed an alternative 4 to the CAC; this proposal included detailed plans to show how they would address constraints, including significant open space and a phasing plan. There is the opportunity to establish development standards and create 700 more jobs. In addition, the development could help to fund improvements at the interchange, which is already at capacity due to Butte College traffic. If the area is left in agriculture, there would be a 300-foot setback required along Durham Pentz Road, which would affect Study Area 15. In addition, the existing zoning is Unclassified, which allows bad planning.
- ◆ Don Swartz spoke about Study Area 14. He requested a Research and Business Park designation along Highway 99. Regarding the issue of competition, business always competes, and that benefits the community. The County's Research and Business Park study includes this property. This would be an opportunity for the County to have an employment generator and economic development. The research and business park would improve the jobs/housing balance. The existing use is marginal grazing land, and much of it has been disturbed from rock extraction. Most of the site is free from vernal pools. Commissioner Nelson asked about the distribution and type of development. Mr. Swartz responded that development would be concentrated along Highway 99. Their plan for a research and business park matches the County's Research and Business Park designation. The Stanford research park is a good example.
- ◆ Howard Isom spoke about Study Area 6. In the 1980's he attempted to develop this property in different fashion than today. Although the Board of Supervisors approved the development, interest rates increased and the neighbors sued them, so they decided to not proceed with the development. Mr. Isom, along with the Halls, has owned this area for a long time. Six hundred homes would not create a significant traffic impact. The area has access to water. They are considering agricultural tourism related to the vineyard, including a small winery and tasting room. This study area is close to Chico. In the short term, they would expand the winery and vineyard. Over 10 to 15 years, they would develop the residential component. There is an opportunity to create something unique. There are already many small parcels in the area, and the Buzztail Community Services

District currently serves about 36 homes. Mr. Isom proposes to build a new road that would provide better access for existing residents. There is a quarry on-site, which could provide the materials for road construction. Agricultural tourism is the future for Butte County. The proposed development would leave significant permanent open space, and includes clustered development, making it more defensible for fire purposes.

- ◆ Ernesto Alvarado is a landowner in Study Area 17. His parcel is 10 acres in size, and it is appropriate for residential development. The parcel has existing infrastructure and services. There is a shortage of affordable housing in Durham, and Mr. Alvarado is interested in providing working class housing to keep people closer to their jobs in Durham. Mr. Alvarado's property is surrounded by urban uses, and there are conflicts between his orchard and these adjacent urban uses.
- ◆ Dylan Paul spoke on behalf of Study Area 15. Mr. Paul noted that this meeting should not have occurred because many members of the public could not attend due to the fire. Mr. Paul clarified the difference between a business and industrial park, which consists of primarily for-profit businesses, and a science/research park, which consists of an interrelated and connected group of participants and can attract things like the renewable energy market. All six of the sites identified in the County's Research and Business Park study should be designated for Research and Business Park. In 2001, as a result of this study, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to proceed with a General Plan Amendment for all six sites with appropriate environmental review.

Research parks include regional collaboration and provide for economic development and a knowledge-based economy. At a regional scale, there would be the opportunity to attract larger entities. By establishing a research facility in central Butte County near the existing Butte Valley community, it would be accessible to everyone. In addition, there are various intersection improvement concepts that project proponents are considering for the Durham Pentz Road and Highway 99 interchange.

Commissioner Nelson noted that the Chico and Oroville airports have been designated to serve as research parks to an extent, and they are accessible via air, but have not been successful. He asked why research park development in Study Area 15, which is only accessible by car, would work. Mr. Paul indicated that multiple research park sites should be identified to make it work. In addition, he

noted that there are access issues with the airports. The research park designation is also significantly different than the Chico and Oroville airports; this designation would include different projects that would involve the energy market. There is also a senate bill underway that would help to fund research and business parks.

- ◆ Bill Brouhard spoke about Study Area 9. Over 150 local residents have contributed to a vision for this study area, which is intended to be combined with the County's vision, the Guiding Principles and input from the General Plan 2030 process. The theme of development in this study area would be mixed-use housing for different affordability levels, a large community park and a 400-acre regional park. Study Area 9 is an important opportunity for development because it is 1 mile from the Chico Mall and has excellent access, gentle topography, strong natural character and open space clusters in non-constrained areas. It is important to develop this under a Specific Plan. The project would pay for its own services and not be a burden. The project would benefit the county, creating 500 jobs. The CAC unanimously supported development in Study Area 9, and the majority felt that it should be done under the County auspices. If the project requires sewer, it would need to be annexed by the City. However, project proponents are considering alternative treatment options, and they would prefer to stay within the unincorporated county. Regardless, the project proponents will continue to cooperate with the City's General Plan Update process. Commissioner Nelson asked why they prefer to stay in the unincorporated county. Mr. Brouhard responded that they are involved in the City's process. However, the project, with its regional park, provides a regional benefit. The County is capable of considering a large-scale Specific Plan and could benefit from it. In addition, the County's process is ahead of the City's, and the study area is located outside of Chico's Sphere.
- ◆ Bob Kromer spoke about Study Area 3. For 20 years the County has been trying to figure out what to do with this area. Chico residents don't want to live in high-rise buildings, so Chico will need to expand. Although it would be ideal for the City and County to work together, it is unlikely. In order for Bell Muir to develop, it needs to be annexed by the City of Chico. However, Chico will not likely consider annexation unless the Mud Creek area is included. If the County and City cannot develop a plan for this area together, then the area should be designated for 1-acre lots, which does not require sewer. The area is not viable agricultural land because of the houses, fences and roads. More than one-third of

the lots are already less than 1 acre in size, and the average lot size is less than 3 acres.

- ◆ Todd Hall, a CAC member, spoke about Study Area 6. His family has owned a portion of this study area for a long time, and they have pride in their community and this area. Mr. Hall would like to see this area kept unified. The CAC recommendation for this study area included 2,400 acres of protected open space. Mr. Hall's family would like to be remembered in this way.
- ◆ Bruce McClintock, a CAC member, noted that the buildout figures discussed as part of specific plans were presented to the CAC as conceptual. Without these concepts, there would not be any buildout numbers. Commissioner Nelson agreed that the numbers should only be looked at as a ballpark estimate. Mr. McClintock noted that at a Chico General Plan meeting he recently attended, there were no buildout figures presented yet.

Planning Commission Discussion

The conclusion of the public comment period transitioned into the Planning Commission's discussion about the Chico and North County Area Preferred Alternative. The discussion was led by Tanya Sundberg, who provided the Planning Commission with a slide show of maps to illustrate each of the alternatives, the CAC's voting history for each study area and the CAC's recommended preferred land use alternative. Using the CAC's input, the Planning Commission deliberated on the appropriate level of development for each study area.

Study Area 2 North Chico Specific Plan

The Commission discussed the appropriateness of an urban reserve for this area, coordination with the City of Chico and provision of services. The Commission asked Chico's Planning Director, Steve Peterson, whether the City would support an urban reserve designation and how the City's plans for the area may differ from the County's. Mr. Peterson responded that the City is looking at the area through the General Plan Update, but they would likely rearrange land uses, in part to provide additional light industrial uses. Mr. Peterson felt that an urban reserve designation would be more appropriate for an unplanned area, but this area has a specific plan in place. The City would most likely be interested in only the urban core.

The Commission also discussed consistency with the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. The Commission voted in favor of the CAC's recommendation of Alternative 1, the existing North Chico Specific Plan, which includes residential, industrial, commercial and public uses with a village core concept, and to work with the City of Chico on a strategy to annex the undeveloped Village Core area. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 3 Bell Muir

The Commission discussed the possibility of including the Mud Creek area north of the study area, the likelihood of the City annexing the area, and whether 1-acre lots should be allowed if the City doesn't annex the area. The Commission voted to designate Study Area 3 for an urban reserve and include a policy that the City must annex the area within 5 years. If the City does not annex the area within the required timeframe, the County would review the study area again. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 4 Forest Ranch

The Commission discussed the retail circle, and why the CAC did not recommend it be focused to existing uses, as was recommended in Bangor. It was noted that the circle does allow some flexibility in zoning. The Commission voted in favor of the CAC recommendation for Alternatives 2 and 3, which designate the majority of the area for agriculture, and retain the retail circle in the town center. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 6 Upper Stilson Canyon

The Commission discussed whether this area is appropriate for growth. Commissioner Nelson supported growth here because it is a large area owned by a few landowners, is adjacent to Highway 32, is located close to Chico, and would not generate a large number of new homes. Commissioner Leland agreed that the developer's proposal is good, but felt that this location is not appropriate for growth during this General Plan timeframe. The Commission voted to support Alternative 2, which designates the entire study area for Resource Conservation. The vote was 2-1, with Commissioner Nelson opposed because he supported the specific plan designation recommended by the CAC.

Study Area 9 Doe Mill/Honey Run

The Commission discussed whether this area should be developed under the City or County auspices, and how services could be provided. The Commission agreed with the minority of the CAC that supported development under the City auspices, but felt that an urban reserve would be more appropriate so that the City could develop their own specific plan. The Commission voted to designate the area an urban reserve with a 5-year timeframe for the City to annex the area. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 14 Nance Canyon/Highway 99

The Commission discussed whether development is appropriate in the general area along Highway 99 south of Chico. Commissioner Leland felt that there should not be any additional growth along Highway 99; the Commission should instead promote compact growth. He doesn't consider the Butte College area to be an existing urban area. Commissioner Nelson felt that the large parcels being considered provide opportunities for good planning. However, the timeframe of this General Plan is not appropriate for this development. The Commission voted to support Alternative 1, the existing General Plan, which would maintain the designation of Agriculture. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 15 Hamlin Canyon/Highway 99

The Commission discussed the appropriateness of development in this study area, and raised similar concerns as in the discussion for Study Area 14. County Council Bruce Alpert noted that there is a development agreement involving a small portion of the study area near the intersection of Durham Pentz Road and Highway 99. The Commission voted to support Alternative 1, which would designate the entire study area for Agriculture, subject to any vested rights under existing development agreements. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 16 Oroville Chico Highway/Highway 99

The Commission voted to support the CAC's recommendation to follow the existing General Plan under Alternatives 1 and 2, which would maintain the designation for Agriculture. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 17 Durham

The Commission discussed the Alvarado property location, which is adjacent to, but outside of the study area boundary and within the buffer of the Durham Dayton

Nelson Area Plan. The Commission voted to support the CAC's recommendation to follow the existing General Plan under Alternative 1, which allows residential, retail, industrial, public and agricultural uses. The Commission also voted to suggest to the Board of Supervisors that they consider modifying the study area boundary to include the Alvarado property based upon the testimony from the landowner concerning urban impacts to this agricultural land. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 18 Durham Dayton/Highway 99

The Commission voted to support Alternatives 1 and 2, the existing General Plan, which designates the study area for Agriculture. The vote was unanimous.

Study Area 19 Durham Pentz/Highway 99

The Commission voted to support the CAC's recommendation for Alternatives 1 and 2, the existing General Plan, which designates the study area for Agriculture, subject to any vested rights and existing development agreements. The vote was unanimous.

Final Planning Commission Recommendation

After the Planning Commission's discussion about individual study areas, the Commission conducted one final vote to indicate that they support the process and the information that was provided, and that the Planning Commission's recommendations for each study area be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for consideration at their Study Sessions scheduled for July 29 and 30, 2008. The vote was unanimous.