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Housing element adopted for existing General Plan

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OROVILLE — Butte County has a new "Housing Element" for its General Plan — but it is for the existing General Plan and not for the one that has been the focus of rewrite and revision for the last two years.

The housing element is one of seven mandated parts of a general plan. It is also the only segment that must be revised every five years, and be approved by the state Department of Housing and Community Development.

Butte County's current housing element was due to expire next Monday.

The Butte County General Plan 2030, which has been the focus of literally dozens of meetings, hearings and workshops over the last two years, isn't expected to be approved by the Board of Supervisors until September 2010.

County officials were under a state deadline to have the existing element revised long before the anticipated General Plan revision is completed.

Matt Kowta, with the Sacramento office of Bay Area Economics, the county's consultant in the housing element revision, stressed the point that this revision is for the existing General Plan.

The 2030 General Plan revision will include a rewrite of the "Land Use Element."

Kowta Tuesday told a joint meeting of planning commissioners and supervisors that changes in the

land use element will most likely result in changes to the housing element.

"We are here today to try to get this adopted because of this Aug. 31 deadline," he continued.

One portion of the housing element did draw a bit more attention.

The state Department of Housing and Community Development required the county to take steps to encourage the development of low- and very-low-income housing.

Mo West, a land developer from Paradise, said a division of his company has constructed 377 low-income housing units in Butte County over the last 20 to 25 years.

However, about 200 of those units are no longer low-income but are now market rate housing.

West said the units ended up as market rate facilities because neither the cities nor the counties have done anything to encourage investors to keep them in the low-income realm.

Paradise Supervisor Kim Yamaguchi asked West what could be done to limit that shift.

West said the county could use community development block grants to help cover the maintenance or other costs for the investors to make it economically viable to keep the properties low-income.

Without taking action on that idea, the supervisors voted unanimously to adopt the new housing element.

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