

Lakeport holds general plan workshops

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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LAKEPORT — Community workshops to discuss the city of Lakeport's draft general plan and its accompanying environmental impact report (EIR) began Wednesday and will continue Thursday afternoon at City Hall. {sidebar id=110}

The Lakeport City Council is hosting the workshops from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

"This is your time to help the city," city Utilities and Community Development Director Mark Brannigan told the small gathering of about a dozen community residents Wednesday.

The meeting's primary purpose was to bring together stakeholders — officials and community members — and explain the importance of the documents, said Brannigan.

"The general plan determines a community's goals and aspirations for community development," said Brannigan. "This document is going to be staff's guiding light as to how we grow the city in the future."

The county's general plan update, accepted in September, took six years to complete, and Lakeport's has been in the works just as long. In November 2002, the Lakeport City Council approved the preliminary budget for the general plan update, which began the process, said Brannigan. Since then, a series of government actions and public meetings have taken place (see sidebar for a timeline of the activities.)

The resulting document, said Brannigan, has gone through "years and years of work."

Brannigan said he believed the plan was both very thorough and environmentally friendly.

He led the group through a discussion of the goals and objectives of the various plan elements: land use, urban boundary, transportation, community design, economic development, conservation, open space and parks and recreation, noise and safety. The housing element, which is updated every five years and was recently adopted in January 2005, won't be a part of the general plan update.

Elements that drew discussion included the urban boundary, with community members and Councilman Bob Rumpfelt concerned that there isn't enough "urban" in Lakeport to justify the use of the word.

Community member Mike Adams said the discussion revealed an important fact about the community's self image as a rural area. "It's semantic but from the community's perspective it's important," he said, adding that the common theme running throughout the general plan is maintaining Lakeport's existing rural character.

Suzanne Lyons, who joins the City Council this month as its newest member, questioned changing the city's sphere of influence to extend south, in order to include several hundred acres of municipal sewer district lands. It's there that the city has discussed building a golf course and subdivision. She asked about specifics of how that property might be developed, which aren't in the plan.

Adams also asked about a plan for the property. Brannigan said the only plan currently being discussed actively is a feasibility study for upgrading the wastewater treatment facility.

Lyons said there is a plan that nobody wants to talk about — which is the subdivision.

Brannigan said he's happy to talk about it, but at this point "it's all talk."

The community design element — which Brannigan said is meant to address the built and natural environment — also drew comment.

Adams asked about mixed use, and if it would encourage spot development.

Planning Services Manager Andrew Britton said mixed use developments generally add residential to existing commercial areas, such as downtown and future employment centers. Eleventh Street is another area of mixed use, with a professional overlay to allow for conversion from residential to commercial. Other policies in the document would help prevent spot zoning, he said.

The economic development element seemed to have conflicts, as meeting participants pointed out. While it calls for attracting businesses and creating a supportive business environment, it also mentions limiting "formula retail businesses" — like chain stores — in order to provide opportunities for local business.

Upper Lake resident Janet Cawn said she "strenuously objected" to the often-discussed golf course development on the city's sewer property. "Golf courses take a lot of water and we have a limited water supply here," she said.

Brannigan said the project would be contingent on wastewater use and the need to dispose of it. "If we don't have a golf course, where are we going to put it?" he asked.

"The economic viability is another question," said Adams.

Adams said in his 30 years here he's seen many golf courses proposed that weren't built. "The four we have here are half dead, most of them," he said, adding that the county doesn't have the population to support them.

Brannigan ended the workshop just after 6 p.m. The council will reconvene at 4 p.m. Thursday at City Hall, 225 Park St.

The city will continue receiving written comments on the EIR and general plan through Dec. 18, and will address those comments through January. Final versions of the plan and EIR will be prepared and given to the Lakeport Planning Commission sometime in January or February, and to the City Council sometime thereafter.

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