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Calaveras Planning Coalition Submits Extensive Comments on the Draft General Plan

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Murphys, CA. In response to the Calaveras County Planning Department request for comments on the Draft General Plan released in December 2014, the Calaveras Planning Coalition submitted 106 pages of comments with 64 attachments by the March 20 deadline.

The Planning Coalition is the primary program of the Calaveras Community Action Project, a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote community-based democracy so that people have more control over their quality of life as it is affected by local government, in particular, local land use planning and management. Coalition members and supporters are united behind eleven Land Use and Development Principles, which promote sustainable growth and development.

In his cover letter, Planning Coalition Facilitator Tom Infusino said, "We have done our best to comment on the little that is in the Draft General Plan. Fortunately, we now know the extent of what is missing. In the months ahead we will try to find those missing pieces and provide them to the County."

Some of what is missing is readily available such as the 2008 Vision Statement and Guiding Principles; various community plans; the Water and Economic Development Elements; and existing land use background. Since its General Plan comments in April of 2007, the Calaveras Planning Coalition has provided the County with a consistent list of relevant topics to include in the General Plan.

Some topics have been skipped over entirely, like child care facilities, and others have been deferred to some unspecified time in the future including community design guidelines, a bicycle and pedestrian master plan, mitigation guidelines for biological resource impacts, a habitat conservation plan, an oak woodlands management program, climate change reduction measures, a parks and recreation plan, uniform defensible space standards for fire safety, and emergency evacuation route designations.

Extremely puzzling was the elimination of ready-to-use standards for agricultural and forest land conversion mitigation and setbacks prepared by the Calaveras Agriculture Coalition and broadly supported by others concerned, including the Planning Coalition.

The 2008 Issues and Opportunities Report identified key topics that the General Plan should embrace. Nevertheless, the Draft General Plan sheds little immediate light on the critical subjects of infrastructure capacity, infrastructure financing, and infrastructure maintenance that were raised in that report. Infrastructure budgets are still not being balanced.

In general, it is disappointing that there are few quantified standards in the Draft General Plan that provide clear direction of what is required of new development. More standards would provide more clarity for the development community and more security for existing residents that their interests will be protected. "It appears as if the County is going out of its way to avoid providing any guidance for both orderly economic development and sound resource conservation," said Infusino.

However, what may be most surprising is that the 2014 Draft General Plan fails to address weaknesses in the current General Plan identified in the 2006 Calaveras County General Plan Evaluation. Since that 2006 critique was the basis for initiating the General Plan Update, the Draft General Plan should at least ensure that the identified flaws be corrected.

Yet, after nine years of planning, there is little evidence that the Circulation Element is correlated with the Land Use Element. There is no background information on the regulatory framework for endangered species habitat

management in the Conservation and Open Space Element. There are still no noise contours in the Noise Element, and there are still no evacuation routes in the Safety Element. The 2006 General Plan Evaluation called for the correction of each of these flaws.

Paradoxically, the nearly completed draft General Plan prepared by the original General Plan consultants, Mintier-Harnish, has been withheld from the public. Mintier-Harnish were released from their contract at the end of 2011 by one in a long line of Planning Directors when they were on track, by their accounting, to produce a completed draft General Plan by Spring 2012.

Given the quality of the recently released General Plan prepared by Mintier-Harnish for San Joaquin County, the Calaveras Planning Coalition believes it is in the public interest for Calaveras County to release the administrative draft prepared by Mintier-Harnish for which we paid over \$900,000. It may have useful and pertinent information for the General Plan and its environmental impact report.

The Planning Coalition strongly encourages Calaveras County to find a way to include community plan information more fully in the General Plan update, to restore the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles, and to release the Mintier-Harnish Draft General Plan. These and other efforts to address what is not in the Draft General Plan would help to repair confidence in the update process. It would also help to respect the diversity of our communities and renew support for the update of the General Plan.

The full text of the Planning Coalition's General Plan comments is available on the Community Action Project website: www.calaverascap.com.