

Planning coalition seeks improvements to open space plan

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Six representatives from the nonprofit Calaveras Planning Coalition at the Oct. 9 meeting of the Calaveras County Planning Commission called on the county to make improvements to the open space plan, which is part of the county's General Plan.

Coalition member Linda Diesem began by agreeing with the county's priority to complete the state's recently required updates to provide equitable access to open space for all residents and to address climate change resilience.

Planning Director Bret Sampson confirmed that the planning department will soon unveil its draft open space plan amendments.

Sue Holper encouraged the county "to take a landscape-level approach to conserve an integrated network of open space resources" over the next two years "to provide outdoor recreation; sustain fish and wildlife habitat; continue agriculture, timber and mineral production; and ensure public safety and protect cultural resources."

Brenda McHenry explained that according to the new Housing Accountability Act, "Any housing regulation that is in any part subjective cannot be applied to a housing project." This invalidated many provisions of the county's open space plan and zoning code. She asked the planning commission, "To edit the existing subjective standards in the open space plan and zoning code so that they can be objectively applied to proposed housing developments."

Speaking on behalf of the CPC, Joyce Techel from Valley Springs explained the need for these changes. She said, "This is about people being safe in the face of worsening wildfires. This is about making sure that ranchers have enough water for their livestock in the face of drier years. This is about making sure that we still have fish and game to hunt despite the declining conditions on our forest lands."

She continued, "This is about securing available funding from the State of California so willing landowners can conserve habitat, sequester carbon, reduce wildfire risks, supplement water supplies, and improve rangeland productivity."

CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino pointed out that the county has placed local landowners in a bad position when they try to compete for state conservation funding. He noted, "The foothill counties with which Calaveras landowners must compete for state open space funds complete their open space plans with some form of implementation timeline including Plumas, Placer, El Dorado, Amador, Tuolumne and Mariposa."

So far, Calaveras County has not done so. To funders, an implementation timeline indicates that the applicant's county is serious about prompt open space conservation.

He asked, "Please add an implementation timeline to help us compete for these funds."

Marti Crane from Valley Springs encouraged the planning commission and local residents to, "Work together to fix the open space plan over the next two years. It will be far easier and far more rewarding than you think."

The CPC is a federation of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning to ensure a health human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future.